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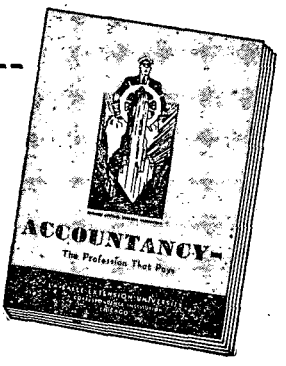

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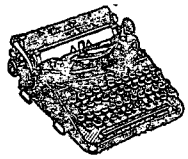

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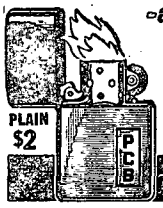

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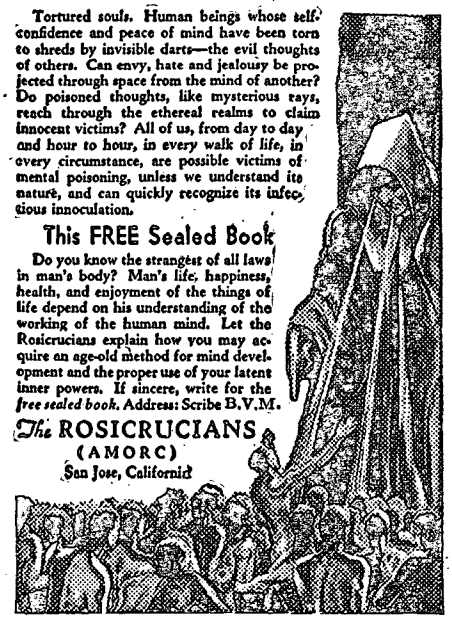

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Destination Unknown

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "The Rogue", "Nice Dogs Don't Sing Dixie", etc.

Here is the Odyssey of a smart young scientist, a fifty-million-year-old fish, and a girl who lied and was beautiful. They started for Rio, innocently enough, but their course lay over perilous seas, and Fate reached across two oceans to draw them into adventure and danger

CHAPTER I

THE EMPTY SHIP

THE cadence of the footfalls on the deck behind him broke the cadence of his breathing; and Gabriel Adams, though retaining the prone comfort of his position on the baked forepeak of the S. S. *Apeldoorn,* opened his eyes sleepily and braved the glare of the sun upon the face of his wrist watch, six inches from the end of his nose.

The watch said eleven o'clock, which explained the footfalls and brought forth a lazy groan from him. The April sun was comfortably hot, for the ship was within thirteen degrees of the Equator. It could have been thick heat, but the prevailing trades, sweeping in across the port quarter from the northeast, cut it immeasurably. There was a premium on raw sunlight.

As far south as Trujillo City in Dominica, the voyage had been singularly unblessed regarding weather, with cloudiness and rain most of the way, and even, further northward off New Jersey, flurries of snow.

Eleven o'clock meant bouillon and Hans van der Decken, the ship's steward. Gabriel rose to his elbows and tried to find van der Decken, but the latter was sunward where the glare was blinding.

"Hans!" he called, "I'll cut your heart out some day. Just once you'll wake me up and offer bouillon when I've got my *pukkah* by my side. Can't you realize the comfort of a passenger, even on a freight tub like this one, makes him an Untouchable? I don't want any of your damn bouillon and you know I don't want it!"

Van der Decken hardly heard him, for he was still some twenty feet away, with the wind between them. Gabriel sat up, shielding his eyes from the day's brightness. The sky was daubed with puffy clouds which sailed on the wind.

He hitched up his swimming trunks and pulled his terrycloth robe under him, leaning back against the iron supports of a completely unsatisfactory canvas swimming pool, the cubic footage of which would have given claustrophobia to a gnat.

He peered dead ahead off the point of the *Apeldoorn's* bow, pleased with the neat ribbed pattern of the Caribbean. There was a faint manifestation of darkness on the perimeter of the waters, like a ragged wisp of soot. It could have been the smoke of a ship, but it was so extensive as to herald a landfall.

Van der Decken let his shadow fall across Gabriel's face, with rare courtesy, so that Gabriel wouldn't have to blind himself in conversation.

"Als 't u belieft, mijnheer," said the steward, nodding. "Bouillon?"

"Didn't you hear me?" Gabriel said. "I'll say this for the Dutch, Hans, they are very stubborn fellows. How many times have I taken passage on this ship—seven—eight times? And how many times have I told you I can't stand bouillon and that I don't want any? Never mind, it's beyond belief. May a Greater Power than I wake you from as comfortable a snooze some day. . . . You don't have your tray anyhow; are you kidding me?"

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In all this havoc that surrounded them, they could only cling together and hope for safety

Van der Decken grinned. *"Ja mijnheer,"* he said. "But you had to be awakened anyhow. This sun is strong, and your back is too white. You'd get a bad sunburn. Besides, the radio officer would like to see you on the bridge deck at your earliest convenience."

Gabriel winced. "Deechen's probably not talking to me by now. I haven't even seen him since we left New York, and we should have all got together for a rummy game before this. What does he want?"

"It's not Mr. Deechen," said Van der Decken, scowling. "We have a new radio officer this voyage. Deechen didn't sail. I thought you knew that."

"No! I wondered why I didn't run into Deechen around and about. I thought it was odd I didn't see him at dinner at all. What happened to him?"

The steward shrugged. "I don't know. He didn't sail, that's all."

GABRIEL looked regretful. "The *Apeldoorn's* personnel seems to be half shot this trip. It was bad enough when Mr. Drakensberg failed to sail. That man, outside of being a shark when it came to getting four of a kind and his hand down first, was really one of the smartest chief officers I've ever met, and his replacement, this Fritz Steuber, is about as friendly as a rattlesnake with rabies. . . . Do you suppose Drakensberg and Deechen were transferred to another Royal Dutch Line ship?"

"Maybe Deechen was," said Van der Decken. "But I heard that Drakensberg was sick and couldn't sail. Captain Klinkert could tell you."

"I think I'll ask him, at that. There go the old rummy sessions. Now all that has to happen is for you and Captain

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Klinkert to leave the ship, and there won't be any reason left to travel on her."

"That's nice of you, *mijnheer.*"

"No, it isn't," Gabriel said, frowning. "I'm serious, Hans. The first time I traveled on the *Apeldoorn* was because I couldn't get another boat for the port I wanted. I forget where I was going now—Belize, wasn't it? And the captain, and you, and Deechen, and Drakensberg—and even the little mouse Cumstock, all made it such a pleasant trip, you sold me completely. Well, look, that was four years ago, and I've never sailed south on another deck since then."

Van der Decken nodded. "Eight trips, *mijnheer.* That is pretty good. You'd better put your robe on, with this sun. You don't want to get too much. To tell you the truth, I was half thinking—"

Gabriel interrupted him, peering ahead. "I guessed that was a landfall and I think I'm right. Isn't it Curacao, Hans?"

"*Ja,*" Van der Decken said.

"You didn't even look."

"*Neen,* I didn't even look." Van der Decken sighed listlessly. "I don't have to look, *mijnheer.* We are due in Wilhelmstad at one o'clock and at one o'clock we will be there. That is the monotony of working on a first-class freight ship. You might as well have a timetable and a train.

"Nothing is ever new at sea. Landfalls are the same, departures are the same, even the gales behave alike. Maybe Deechen is tired of it like me. It's enough to make a man melancholy." He coughed to express melancholia. "I was half thinking of leaving the ship myself."

Gabriel rose to his feet and wrapped his robe around himself, the wind beating it between his legs. He studied the steward, repressing a smile. The bloom of health upon the pink-skinned face of van der Decken made any presence of melancholia an anachronism.

Van der Decken was younger than himself, as big, with flaxen hair, blue eyes and an incredibly rugged face, his cheekbones, nose and chin all minor promontories, along with a marked protrusion above the eyes. There was something medieval about his face, but it was hardly sensitive.

"It isn't the sea," Gabriel said. "Most jobs get monotonous after awhile, and the other fellow's grass always looks greener. I wouldn't be hasty leaving all this." He indicated the vastness. "It has certain elemental values which you would miss."

"I know," van der Decken said, his chin thrust forward. "But I didn't come to sea for a job, I came for adventure. I ran away from home when I was nineteen and shipped to see all of the cities and lands I had read about in school. Adventure, *foei!* There would have been more adventure if I had stayed with my father and become a *bloemist* and raised tulips!"

Gabriel laughed. "You sound thoroughly jaded."

"Jaded?" The steward puzzled. "That is a new word for me. Does it mean bored? Because I am so bored that I have thought of going home and buying a little farm near Groningen—that's the home town—and marrying a she who wasn't a ship. *Ja,* Mijnheer Adams, a wife to warm my bed at night and give me children. There is no time for boredom with children. I know I was the sixth myself, and even then, not the last."

GABRIEL smiled, "Your lady *Apeldoorn* may not warm you at night, but you can always invest in a pair of woolen socks. And think of her stability, her quietude, the simplicity of life aboard her. A lot of folk would trade with you in a moment. I know, I know—it's spring and you're young. I prescribe a dose of sulphur and molasses before you do something horrible."

"Oh well," Van der Decken said drily, "that's all right for you. But I'm different."

"I resent that."

The steward chuckled. "*Ja,* but women do not interest you. I've seen them follow you around like dogs waiting for a scrap from the table; you wouldn't even throw them a bone."

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"Hmm," Gabriel admitted, "you're right, of course. I'm prejudiced. It's not just a whim. Women are trouble. I always have thought so; and then I had it too graphically confirmed when a friend of mine lost his life because of a woman who lost her head. Yes, Hans, women are trouble and adventure is an illusion."

"You're one to be cynical, *mijnheer. Heusch!* It's easy to say it is illusion after you have adventures to find that out, *natuurlijk.* But just the same, it must be exciting to head a museum and take so many trips to capture things."

Gabriel looked pained. "Head of a museum? Where did you get that idea? Come on and walk me to my cabin, Hans. I can see you need an object lesson. If you think I'm a glamor boy, you're the only one who does.

"In New York, at the Federal Museum, I'm a relatively unimportant guy they call a research associate and assistant curator. In what department? It will kill you, my boy. In the Department of Living and Extinct Fishes."

They paused to step over the high sill and then descend the staircase amidships. Gabriel resumed, "I forgot to mention that I am also credited with being a research associate in paleontology, and, of course, there is my Ph.D. Is this too exciting for you, Hans?"

"You're exaggerating," Van der Decken replied, his brow furrowed. "A young man like you being all those things?"

"Good Lord, you aren't awed by them? The lesson is lost. Yes, Hans, they're mine, all mine; and I couldn't give them away. They make me a very flinty fellow."

"Until some one meets you, *mijnheer.*"

"That is outright flattery," Gabriel grinned, "and beside the point. I spend most of my time delving in informed piscatorial journals trying to garner information on some high odored *visch* who might have been the Adam of the flounder family. Or, I'm off to a lovely desert, temperature 102°, to look for fossils. There's a perilous pastime! But the deadliest work is arranging and building exhibits in the museum!"

At the cabin, on C deck, Gabriel invited the steward in. "Have a seat while I dress. I can see the gleam of doubt in your eye. Oh go on, sit down, forget you're the steward. The door's closed."

Van der Decken refused to sit down. He lounged at the doorway between the sitting-room and bedroom. The suite was the largest the *Apeldoorn* boasted. "You must have had adventures sometimes, *mijnheer.* I think you're pulling my leg."

"I went on an expedition to visit the Jivaros once, the headhunters of Ecuador. We were supposed to find out all about *curari* in the raw."

"*Ja?*" Van der Decken said, his eyes gleaming. "It was not exciting there?"

Gabriel poked his head out of the bathroom. "It was a very gay affair. The packs weighed a ton. It was hot. It was very dirty. A fer-de-lance left a fang in my right boot at one spot. The ticks ticked. Every insect south of Panama got his measure of blood out of me. There was a very charming young woman in the party. She shot my best friend dead when he tripped and fell outside her tent in the dead of night. He was on guard. She thought it was a Jivaro with her virtue as his goal. We never did find the Jivaros. It was quite an adventure, Hans. Have you had enough?"

"You make it sound unpleasant, *mijnheer. Wel,* then what of this trip? What are you off to this time?"

"RIPROARING, high-binding stuff this time." Gabriel came out of the bedroom in a white linen suit. "How do I look? All right? Tailor did a good job on this left pocket. I stuck a hot pipe in there and forgot it, and the ashes burned through. You'd never know it now. . . .

"Yes, this will be the epitome of boredom, Hans. I'm bound for an Ishi congress in Rio de Janeiro. I ought to take you along and teach you a sound lesson in *ennui.*"

Van der Decken looked completely blank. "Ishi? I never heard it. *Ik versta het niet.*"

"An Ishi is a member in good standing of the International Society of Herpetolo-

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gists and Ichthyologists," Gabriel said. "Don't ask me to explain what that means. Take it for granted. The annual congress is May 15th and I'm lazing my way down to represent the Federal Museum."

He smiled as the steward's face fell. "Beginning to get the idea? Good. Stick with the *Apeldoorn*, Hans, she's your real option on action. One day they'll send her back to Rotterdam, and you'll have a lot of fun dodging the German submarines and the British mines. That, I suppose, is real adventure, and you'll get your bellyful of it quick enough. I'm off to see the radio officer. I wonder what the devil he wants?"

Van der Decken shrugged. "See you at lunch, *mijnheer*."

Gabriel nodded and detained the steward. "That's another thing I wanted to talk to you about. Where are all the passengers on this ship? I only saw that Cuban, Daracha, who got off in Santiago. Isn't there anyone else aboard?"

"As a matter of fact, there isn't," said van der Decken soberly. "We had a full passenger list in New York, but no one else arrived to sail."

"That's odd. They all cancelled?"

"No one cancelled. They all paid for their cabins in advance to reserve them. So we sailed with empty cabins. After all, they had been bought and reserved. We can't sell them again. There were some radiograms from people who will join the ship in Trinidad."

"You mean they're flying to Port of Spain to meet this tub?"

"*Ja, mijnheer.*"

"That doesn't make sense. The ship only goes to Rio, then back again. Why the devil would you fly most of the way to catch a slow freighter?"

"Maybe they were afraid of the Caribbean as a war area," said Van der Decken. "*Neem mij niet kwalijk,* but I must go to the commissary now."

Gabriel left him and went upstairs to the bridge deck where the radio shack was located, starboard side, just abaft the deckhouse.

He was not at all satisfied with Van der Decken's explanation for the absence of the list. The reality of war had, truly, been brought into the Western Hemisphere. There was the charred hulk of the Graf Spee off Montevideo to testify to that.

And, with the rumors of Nazi submarines operating in the Caribbean, it was only natural that some of the intended passengers might have lost their nerve. But not all of them! Indeed, it would have been more in the American vein to take passage for the Indies and the South Atlantic in hopes of stumbling across a sea action.

There were fair possibilities, after all, with the *Luetzow* and *Scheer* at large.

CHAPTER II

ONE FISH, AGE 50,000,000

HE KNOCKED on the door of the radio shack where the legend *Verboden toegang* was inscribed, and entered without waiting. The radio officer rose from the face of his equipment which lined the walls, black and shiny, studded with dials. "Yes, sir?" he said sharply. "Are you Mr. Adams?"

"Yes. The steward told me you wanted to see me."

"That's right. I hope you don't think it was presumptuous of me, Mr. Adams, but on a ship of this size, we're necessarily short-handed, and I did not want to send the message down with him because I wasn't certain that it made sense. There are eccentricities of operation which sometimes cause mistakes, particularly with unfamiliar words."

Gabriel was surprised at the man's excellent use of English, with no trace of accent whatsoever. "That's all right, I don't mind coming up. I don't think I know you. What happened to Deechen? Transferred?"

"My name is Thimm," said the radio officer smoothly. "Rudolph Thimm. I'm sure I haven't the slightest idea what happened to Mr. Deechen. I never heard of him, of course, until I replaced him. These

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transfers are all handled by the Line. You didn't know he was not aboard until now?"

His brows lifted.

"Until a few minutes ago," Gabriel said. "It's not important. He happened to be a friend of mine."

He stared at Thimm, remotely ashamed of his instantaneous decision to dislike the man, for he felt that the dislike was purely a reaction to his fondness for Deechen and the act of replacement.

But there were other considerations. Thimm had roving eyes which passed his own fleetingly and found strong points of interest in the blank wall behind Gabriel's back. He did not address himself directly, but at the crest of Gabriel's shoulder.

He was a small round-shouldered man, thin-faced, his mouth sharp and his chin receding. His tight smile was artificial, and thus rather unpleasant. He combed his thinning hair somewhat ridiculously to camouflage a bald spot on the top of his head.

He plucked a radiogram from the desk and thrust it at Gabriel furtively.

"I received this from New York through Mackay Radio at ten-forty-seven, Mr. Adams. Some of it made sense and some didn't. I wanted to corroborate with New York, but I thought you should see it first. I don't wish to seem unduly curious, but perhaps it is in code—"

Gabriel took the message. "If it's in code, that'll make two of us who can't understand it. There's no one who would wireless me in code. I don't have any code."

He read through it hastily and looked blank. He scowled and reread it with more care.

Its full meaning struck him, and he colored, his face seeming to swell as he dilated his eyes, swallowed hard and then gasped.

"No wonder you didn't get it!" he said. "I can't believe it myself! Why, it's the most marvelous thing I ever heard of! . . . If it's true. It can't be true! It's amazing. Wait a minute. Let me sit down and look at this thing!"

HE FELL into a chair and scanned the radiogram again. Thimm said, puzzling at him, "I never saw those words *ganoid* and *isopholis* before. I thought there might have been a mistake—"

"It's a fish," Gabriel exclaimed. "It's all about a fish, but I can't believe it! It couldn't happen to me, it's too damn unique! Dr. Kaufman got technical here, that's what threw you off. Why, this is the biggest thing that ever happened to the Federal Museum, if it's true, and it just might be. I'll find out soon enough. It just might be!"

"Is a fish so important?" Thimm asked, a hint of suspicion in the query.

"This one is," Gabriel said, flushed and excited. "This one happens to be fifty million years old—"

"Oh!" Thimm said. "Oh, I understand. An extinct fish."

Gabriel resented the man's complacency. "Extinct my eye! I don't think you do understand. If it's true, this fish has been extinct for fifty million years and *yet was netted last week*, off Cayo Grande! You couldn't possibly understand what that means—"

Thimm nodded, quickly disinterested and said, "A reply was requested. If you'd care to give me an answer, I'll transmit it at once."

"I've got to see the captain," Gabriel said. "I'll send an answer when I come back."

"You'll be leaving the ship then at Wilhelmstad?"

Gabriel came back to earth, shocked by the bold eagerness of Thimm's voice.

At once, he regretted the quick enthusiasm which had let him talk so familiarly with the radio officer. He folded the radiogram deliberately and put it into his pocket. "Possibly," he said with reluctance. "I don't know." He thought he detected a faint expression of disappointment in Thimm's watery eyes, but he was not sure.

It was small satisfaction.

Sedate and dignified in his departure from the radio shack, Gabriel dropped the pretense on the boat deck and raced for-

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ward toward the bridge. He climbed up and entered it noisily, slamming the port door and startling the helmsman.

"You should not be up here, *mijnheer,*" the watch officer Cumstock said. "The bridge is forbidden passengers." He was sharp and severe.

"I know," said Gabriel. "But I've got to see the captain."

"He is in his cabin," Cumstock said, still reprovingly.

"Thanks," Gabriel said. "*Dank u.*"

He caught a quick glimpse of the land ahead, Curacao, sitting in the sun, dead on the bow, but still an hour away.

The visibility was unlimited, no haze at all, and the rocky hills of the island, almost bare of trees, looked sandy and colorless.

He left the bridge and retreated along the deck of the master's cabin where, after a deep breath, he knocked and went in.

CAPTAIN PETER KLINKERT'S eyes were laughing and he said in his booming voice, "So, Gabriel, you are trying to upset my ship, *neen?* Mr. Cumstock telephoned from the bridge this moment. Scaring my quartermaster two degrees off his course, *wel!*"

"You're pulling my leg, Captain," Gabriel said. "I guess I did burst in, but I had to see you. I've got to leave the ship at Wilhelmstad and get to La Guayra as quickly as possible. I didn't know about connections—"

"Leaving the ship?" Captain Klinkert replied, displeased. "That's bad news. What's happened to you?"

"Biggest thing yet. Very important. Of course, it'll sound very silly to you, but—here, read the radiogram yourself and then I'll explain it to you."

Captain Klinkert told him to sit down and sit still, and accepted the radiogram. He read it aloud, slowly, glowering as he did so.

GANOID ISOPHOLIS BRITISH TRIASSIC CAPTURED CAYO GRANDE STOP CONTACT BRAGGE LA GUAYRA SECRECY ESSENTIAL PAY TO TEN THOUSAND STOP CONFIRM KAUFMAN.

Captain Klinkert handed the message back to him and made a grim face. "We Dutch are fine linguists, Gabriel. But we are not seers, *ei?* Something British has been captured and you want to buy it in La Guayra." He shrugged. "Am I wrong?"

"Horribly," said Gabriel, grinning. "The truth is, Captain, that a man named Bragge who happens to be a contributing member of the Federal Museum, stumbled on something big. Somehow he's laid hands on a fish, caught in the south Caribbean, which is supposed to have been extinct for the last fifty million years.

"This fish goes back to the Mesozoic era, the days of giant reptiles, dinosaurs and pterodactyls. Fossilized, it has been found in that layer of earth known as the British triassic. It belongs to the *ganoid* family, and more particularly to the genus *isopholis.*"

Captain Klinkert coughed. "Gabriel, you are a young fool, *ja,* talking so profoundly of smelly fish when you should be marrying some nice plump *meisje!*

"What kind of work is this you do for a stuffy museum, where does it get you? A man who plays rummy like you, consorting with—with mullet! *Foei!* So many times you have shipped with me on the *Apeldoorn,* each time you get older, each time no *vrouw.*"

"That's what van der Decken said. Considering the fact you are both bachelors, I'm inclined to regard it as a sort of frustration," Gabriel said. "And I'm not going to argue with you. I want to know about transportation. Is there any way I can get out of Wilhelmstad and to La Guayra on the Main in a hurry?"

"Nothing faster than an aeroplane," Captain Klinkert chuckled.

"You're a rogue. Are you kidding?"

CAPTAIN KLINKERT shook his head. "No, I am not kidding. . . . Oh, these American expressions, my *vader* would turn in his grave if he could hear me speak this American *papiamento.* Haven't you ever been to Curacao? Oil makes a land important, Gabriel, and Curacao boasts the refineries like Aruba. Also, oil brings an

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airline to Wilhelmstad, the Trans-American, and I am certain you can take a ship to La Guayra, and then all the way on to Buenos Aires if you wish."

"That's good luck!" Gabriel said. "That solves everything."

"Good. So you are leaving my ship for a dead fish. I should be insulted. And we have not had a decent rummy game this voyage."

"But that's the point, don't you see? I don't want to leave the *Apeldoorn*. I have a date in Rio on the fifteenth of May, and there's no point in arriving there earlier than that. I figure to pick up the *isopholis* in Venezuela, and then catch another aeroplane, and fly on to Port of Spain in Trinidad, and meet up with you and the *Apeldoorn* there. That would be your next port after Wilhelmstad."

Captain Klinkert nodded. "*Ja*. We will not be there for almost another week. I'm taking on fuel oil here and I won't sail until tomorrow afternoon. I should be in the Gulf of Paria next Monday. You are going to bring that fish aboard?"

"Of course," Gabriel said. "Every ichthyologist in the world will envy me the time I have that fish to myself between Trinidad and Rio. I've got to identify it, classify it—"

"Fifty million years old," said Captain Klinkert. "It should smell heavenly." He held his nose and threw his eyes toward the ceiling.

Gabriel started to explain again, then desisted, for he never knew when the captain was shrewdly jocular, or ingenuously humorous.

"Then I can leave most of my things aboard and keep my cabin," he said, "and just take a few things with me on the plane. For heaven's sake, now, look for me in Port of Spain, unless I radio differently, will you?"

"*Ja*, I will look for you, Gabriel. But have a care to be there. This ship isn't my own to grow barnacles on her bottom while I wait to clear for a *dwass* American who is in love with a Mesozoic herring! I have a schedule to keep. You miss me in Port of Spain, and you don't see me again until the *Apeldoorn* reaches Bahia in Brazil."

"I'll see you in Port of Spain," Gabriel promised. "It won't take me ten minutes to get possession of that fish if it's genuine and for sale. I'll be in Trinidad long before you get there."

Captain Klinkert sighed and rose heavily from his chair, a large round man. "We are coming in soon now. I must get up to the bridge. *Ja*, they need me there, for this Shottegat Harbor is a narrow tricky thing. Big liners cannot even go in to Wilhelmstad, with their deep draft. But we will set you on the main street of Wilhelmstad, Gabriel, for a landing *plaats*. Go pack your things."

"All right," said Gabriel. "And by the way, Captain, what happened to Mr. Deechen this trip? You've got a new man in the radio shack."

"Thimm? *Aba*, he is a weasel. Deechen reported sick in New York, and they gave me Thimm. It was a last minute affair. I understood that both Deechen and Drakensberg were in a hospital. They had some sort of accident, concussions and head bruises, I heard, but I have no details." He coughed. "Have you seen my first officer?"

"I saw him once," Gabriel said. "Fritz Steuber."

"Cold fish, eh, Gabriel? To tell you the truth, I only began to appreciate that Drakensberg this trip when he wasn't along. And if Thimm is a weasel, this chief officer is a clam. He does his job and then he hibernates in his cabin. I think he is anti-social, eh?" He growled in his mustache. "Say goodby to me before you leave the ship."

"Yes, I will."

CHAPTER III

DISABLED SEAMEN

GABRIEL returned to the radio shack and permitted himself the satisfaction of ignoring the *No Admittance* sign to enter without knocking. Thimm seemed startled by the quick opening of the door, and looked annoyed.

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"I'm leaving the ship," Gabriel said. "I want to send a message to New York."

Thimm nodded, with a satisfied smile, and sat down with a blank and a pencil. Gabriel stared hard at the back of the radio officer's neck and murmured, "I found out about Mr. Deechen, Thimm. He had an accident in New York."

"That was too bad."

"It seems both he and the first officer, Drakensberg, were hurt in an accident."

Thimm was studiedly cool. "Too bad. I didn't know the men."

Gabriel shrugged. "Here's my message."

"Yes, sir."

"Dr. Emmet Kaufman, Federal Museum, New York. Confirming wireless discovery *ganoid*. Stop. Proceeding by plane acquire specimen if possible. Stop. Rejoin *Apeldoorn* at Port of Spain—"

He paused and glanced at Thimm. "Are you getting it?"

"Pardon," Thimm said abruptly, a trifle pale, "my pencil point broke. You are not leaving us for good?"

"Oh, no! Where was I? Will rejoin *Apeldoorn* at Port of Spain, retaining specimen in possession until finish of Ishi congress. Will fly it home then. Reach me cable office La Guayra and Queen's Park, Port of Spain. Will telephone from Trinidad if good news. Gabriel."

Thimm looked up, and Gabriel nodded that that was all. Thimm read it back to him carefully, and then counted the words and said, "Expensive, Mr. Adams, over forty *gulden*."

"American money?"

"Fifteen dollars, twenty cents."

Gabriel paid for it then. "Are you Dutch, Thimm?"

"Yes, of course."

"You speak such excellent English," Gabriel said. "No accent whatsoever."

"True," Thimm nodded. "I've been in the United States a long time." He coughed and folded his hands. "Good luck to you, Mr. Adams. I hope you catch your fish."

"Thanks," Gabriel said.

"We shall see you again in Port of Spain."

"Yes," Gabriel said evenly. "You may count on that."

They smiled at each other with extreme politeness, and then Gabriel left and went below to his cabin.

"Now what," Gabriel wondered, "has that bird got on his mind?"

WHILE he emptied one of his lighter suitcases to repack it with essentials, he felt nervous. It was only natural, he reasoned, that the extreme excitement of such a spectacular find as the *isopholis* would knot his stomach. But Thimm disturbed him too.

Gabriel seldom disliked anyone. If things approached dislike, he preferred to avoid and ignore a man entirely; the philosophy had won him few enemies.

But there was something fascinating about the oily timidity of the man. Harmless enough, still he gave Gabriel the impression that for all his humble courtesy, he might have had a dagger in his back pocket. It was a definite impression.

When he finished packing the bag, Gabriel rang for the steward.

Under his feet, he could feel the *Apeldoorn* had slowed, and the faint faraway blows of the seas on the port side, which crept up through the steel plates to the balls of his feet like heartbeats, had disappeared.

Hans van der Decken presently knocked on the door. "Come in," Gabriel said.

Van der Decken closed the door and looked alarmed. "Why are you packing, *mijnheer?* You are leaving us? Something is wrong?"

"Sit down," Gabriel said. "I've got to fly to the Main but I'm coming back to meet up with you in Port of Spain. I'm leaving all this luggage in the cabin. You can keep an eye on it for me. . . . You didn't tell me Deechen was hurt in New York."

"Was he hurt? I didn't know that. Who told you?"

"Captain Klinkert."

"*Ja?* And Drakensberg?"

"Same complaint as Deechen. They ap-

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pear to have been in an accident and sustained a similarity of injuries. Doubtless, they were together."

"Oh, said van der Decken. "Taxi probably. Those taxis—"

"Possibly but not probably," Gabriel said. "Captain Klinkert said there were only concussions and contusions on the head. Our metropolitan taxis are more lethal than to localize the injuries to that extent on two persons at the same time. Sounds more as if they had been in a fight on the short end. I've got an unconscionable hunch they were beaten up."

Van der Decken was nonplussed. "I don't understand that, *mijnheer*. Drakensberg and Deechen in a brawl? Not those two. They're married men."

"I think what I think."

"I'm sure you're wrong," Van der Decken persisted. "Really, *mijnheer*."

"Couldn't some one have paid a couple of thugs to hospitalize them so that a couple of berths would be left open on this ship? Maybe for instance, jobs are scarce, and Thimm and Steuber—"

Van der Decken laughed without the deference due a paid passenger.

"All right, all right," Gabriel said. "I wouldn't put it past Thimm. Have you met him? He doesn't like me."

"You mean he was rude, *mijnheer?*"

"Stop bristling, Hans. You're too impetuous. No, he wasn't rude. Not in a manner of speaking. He just didn't like me, and I returned his deep affection. Am I a social leper aboard here? He wasn't anxious for me to remain aboard or rejoin the ship. And don't tell me it was my imagination."

Van der Decken smiled smugly and made no reply.

GABRIEL shrugged. "I see by your Mona Lisa glow that I should be ashamed of myself for harboring thoughts of intrigue. Forgive me, Hans, forgive me. I forgot your recent thesis, all voyages are exactly the same. Take care of my baggage while I'm gone, will you? I've got an expensive projector there."

"Ja, I'll take care of it. If this bag is ready, leave it to me. You should be on deck for we are coming into the Shottegat, and Wilhelmstad is very pretty from a distance."

Gabriel got his hat and raincoat, made sure he had all his papers and then he locked his trunk.

Van der Decken took his bag up to the head of the staircase on A deck where Mr. Nardo, the purser, had his office, and waited there until Gabriel came up.

The massive Dutchman held out his hand and beamed on Gabriel.

"Have a good trip, *mijnheer!*"

Gabriel shook hands with him. "I'll see you in Trinidad and tell you all about it, Hans," he said.

His eyes twinkled. "And about that Deechen-Drakensberg fracas, it occurs to me that if I were going to seize a ship and scuttle her, the two important posts I'd take over would be chief officer and radio officer, one to take command when the captain was out of action, the other to prevent use of the transmitter to get out the foul news— Are you listening to me?"

"Every word, *mijnheer,*" van der Decken grinned. *"Gij scheerst!* We will manage to keep the poor *Apeldoorn* afloat until you come back to her."

"See that you do," Gabriel said with a smile.

A few minutes later, from the open deck, Gabriel saw the blossoming of gaudy colors which was Wilhelmstad, with its fiery scarlet, or brilliant yellow or sharp blue walls, for at Curacao nature forgot her hues, and the people of the town made up those hues in their own garish fashion, disregarding the fact that prim windows and neat steep gables of the houses belonged to a more conservative century.

Gabriel's impression of the place was that it was picturesque and immaculate; he did not have time for more than this, for it was his good fortune to make perfect connections, and within the hour, he was in the air in a Trans-American amphibian, heading southeast for La Guayra, Venezuela.

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CHAPTER IV

THE LADY LETTI

FIVE days later, when the aeroplane from La Guayra left the hooked finger of the Main (which stretches eastward toward Trinidad, creating at the meeting, a strait known as the Bocas del Dragon) Gabriel found himself above the glistening Gulf of Paria.

The day was windless, the shallow Gulf below calm, with the exception of cats-paws which caught up the sun and sparkled brilliantly.

They made the water look beautiful; actually, it was not, for the Orinoco Delta close by left the Gulf a constant murky brown.

The sun flashes on the surface reminded Gabriel of his prize exhibit in the Federal Museum, far away at that moment, which had suffered from the single flaw of this same light reflection.

The exhibit was a masterpiece, a habitat of Florida Keys fishes, so real in their gorgeous colors as they poised above sea anemones and undulating seaweed as to make Dr. Kaufman, the curator, remark, "Gabriel, they have been petrified by a Medusa! It is magnificent! You wait for the spell to break and for the fish to flash away. Excellent job!" Except for the glass pane which had picked up the light reflections and spoiled the whole thing.

Gabriel had later replaced it with polarized glass.

He watched the sun flashes through his port, aware that he was tired. Five days of anticipation, climaxed with the possession of a prehistoric prize was too much for him.

He thought of the *Apeldoorn* again and longed for the quiet routine of existence aboard her. He was glad the chase was over. He did not even feel eager to examine his specimen minutely, although his inspection had been cursory. Before it was packed in La Guayra.

It was hard to remember everything.

Fatigue confused his picture of the majestic red mountains of Venezuela which rose precipitously from the sea, with the unshaved stubble of Mr. Bragge's chin, with the unspeakable ugliness and squalor of La Guayra itself, with the amazing Portugee fisherman who had netted the *isopholis,* and with the paltry figure of one hundred pesos for which he had bought the *ganoid.*

Fatigue dulled everything, even elation, and when the dark green of Trinidad broke on the rim of the Gulf of Paria, with the city of Port of Spain on the plain northward, before its backdrop of mountains, Gabriel Adams sighed thankfully and strained to see some sign of the S.S. *Apeldoorn* which was not due and had not arrived, naturally.

When a landing had been effected, Gabriel followed the Queen's Park porter to his car and went out to the other end of Port of Spain where he registered at the Inn, asked not to be disturbed, and repaired to his room, carrying the boxed prehistoric fish himself, refusing to allow a porter to touch it.

He locked his door, hastily climbed into a pair of pyjamas, and fell asleep. He did not awaken until the following morning, at eleven, when the rapping of a porter announced the fact that there was a radiogram for him from New York.

ALL Dr. Emmet Kaufman asked was that Gabriel telephone him at the earliest possible convenience. Gabriel couldn't help grinning. The long sleep had refreshed him; half sitting up in his bed, he began to appreciate the same sense of excitement which the old boy was catching in New York.

Some sadistic quirk made him consider holding poor Kaufman up in the air a little while longer. In New York, the suspense must have been horrible, after his brief cable from La Guayra:

FISH GENUINE ONE HUNDRED PESOS DEAL CLOSED ON TO TRINIDAD

But he resisted the impulse, and put through his call. When the connection was completed, he was surprised at the clarity of the impulses, for although Dr. Kauf-

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man sounded far away, his voice was remarkably clear. "Hello, doctor," Gabriel said.

"In the name of heaven," Dr. Kaufman shouted, "tell me about it! You didn't have to be so close-mouthed with your cable! The museum is paying for it. Genuine fish indeed! What is it?"

"It's a wonderful specimen of *Isopholis Orthostomus*," Gabriel said with certain pride. "Really wonderful. The enamel armour plates on the head are in excellent condition, and the teeth superb. Scales rhombic. An overdeveloped opercle. High dorsal fin. Oh, the real thing!"

"How was it caught? Where—"

"A Portuguese named Lasca," Gabriel said, "netted it from a trawler not far off the northwest of Cayo Grande.

"He said he dropped his nets to a mile depth and when this thing came up among the other fish, he knew it wasn't an ordinary fish and he thought it might be worth something. He skinned it and brought the skin over."

"You didn't get the bones?"

"No, lost them. He discarded them. Too bad. I had the thing mounted in La Guayra, rotten job, but it will do for the time being. You can thank your favorite star for the chance that sent Lasca to Bragge."

"Gabriel, listen," said Dr. Kaufman. "I want you to go to your Lloyd's agent in Port of Spain and insure that fish. That's a very valuable thing and we've got to cover ourselves. If anything happened to it— Insure it for ten thousand dollars . . . Amazing! Incredible! Makes a man believe in sea serpents. It's possible—"

"This is costing money," Gabriel said.

"All right. Keep in touch with me. Goodbye."

GABRIEL hung up. He felt pretty good. He took a bath, shaved and then dressed in his white linen, which was still respectable, and went down to lunch.

The dining room was out of doors, and very large. He felt human again. He sat at his table, ordered. When he had finished, and the waiter had left the table, he glanced around at the multitude of diners.

They were tourists, largely, and he assumed a cruise ship must have come in. His eyes fell, presently, upon a young woman opposite him across the room.

For a moment, he had had an impression that he was being stared at; he looked again and with a little unpleasant shock decided he was right.

Gabriel avoided her eyes, for her stare was frank and unwavering. She wasn't trying to—flirt, he supposed was the word. She looked perplexed, as though she thought she knew him. He had never seen her before in his life.

He hastily drank his glass of water and saw her rising from her table to come toward him. "Oh Lord," he groaned.

Keeping his glance averted so that there would be no possibility of encouragement, Gabriel toyed with a spoon, wishing vainly for the waiter. The girl came to his table, seemed to pass by, then she tapped him on the shoulder.

Gabriel looked up at her. She said, "Hello."

She was very pretty, he had to admit.

He hadn't considered her looks, other than the fact that she was definitely female, when he first saw her. But close to him, she was pretty in a Dresden China way, her features small and delicate, her skin naturally pale. Her mouth was sharp and—Gabriel thought—cruel. But then, most pretty women were apt to look cruel.

She smiled at him pleasantly, her eyes very wide. Myopic, he diagnosed; for the pupils were large and dark and she showed too much of the whites.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake," he said, not too severely. "I don't believe I've ever had the pleasure."

"Of course you haven't," she said. "But I know you. I've seen you often in New York, but you were always busy on some exhibit or other. You're Gabriel Adams."

Gabriel was astounded. He had already sprung to his feet. "But that's right!"

"Of course it's right," she said. Her laughter was gay and unresentful. "Did you think I was trying to pick you up?

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Uncle Emmet would die of sheer horror if his favorite niece went bursting around the tropics flirting with every white linen suit in port! Oh, really!"

"You're Dr. Kaufman's niece?"

"Yes. I'm Letti Gaynor. No *e*. Silly name, isn't it? Hasn't he mentioned me?"

"As a matter of fact, no," Gabriel said. "Dr. Kaufman doesn't mix his personal affairs with the museum staff, so it's not—"

"Then he's an old hypocrite," said Letti wryly, "for he talks about you enough outside his fossilized old office."

"That's flattering. Won't you join me?"

"Love to," she said. "I hate to eat alone, and I was just sitting there dreading the whole thing when you came in. I thought I recognized you. Then when you sat down, I was certain.

"Whatever are you doing in Port of Spain? If you tell me that you came in on the *Santa Rosa* yesterday—" She gritted her fine white teeth. "I've been bored to death the whole cruise so far, and if I found out you'd been aboard all the time, it would really be too much."

"Oh, I see," Gabriel said. "This is a stopover for the *Santa Rosa*. You're taking a South American cruise?"

"Yes. Dad thought I was getting night-club pallor in New York, and he all but shanghaied me. Said I needed sun and sea air. Well, I've had enough sea and air to do me a lifetime, thank you. And I'm such a poor sailor." For an instant she seemed to sober, and he had the unpleasant sensation that she was measuring him. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE GIRL WORKS FAST

THE waiter arrived and Gabriel requested a menu which he gave to Letti Gaynor. She glanced at it vaguely and then handed it back and said, "Oh, anything—I'll have the same as you. I'm not really hungry. I'm too excited! A real live man!

"Really, Gabriel—do you mind—there are nothing but women aboard that ship, and finding some one to dance with at night is akin to braving a bargain basement. The competition is ghastly—you haven't answered my question."

"I flew in from the Main last night," Gabriel said. "I'm en route to Rio."

Her eyes brightened. "You mean you're going down on my boat? Rio is our next port!" She laughed. "I know I'm indecent, with my talons in you, but we could have such fun—"

"No," Gabriel said, lending a polite note of regret. "I'm terribly sorry. I'm going down on another boat, a slow freighter."

"Oh," Letti murmured, her face falling. "That's a shame."

"Why?"

"Because you're good-looking and I'm lonely."

Gabriel laughed. "I've already been in passage aboard the *Apeldoorn*, and my baggage is still aboard her. She's not due until tomorrow morning."

"But the *Santa Rosa* won't sail until tomorrow noon. You could swing it if you were a gallant blade." She raised her eyes at him. They looked enormous.

Gabriel was silent with embarrassment. He didn't want to be rude. "I'm sorry," he said.

"What will Uncle Emmet say?"

"Off with my head! That is, if you tell on me."

"I won't," Letti said, pouting. "But I wish you'd change your mind. You aren't a bit flattering. What else can I do? I've all but thrown myself at you. Will you show me around Trinidad, at least, until I sail?"

"That I can do," Gabriel said. "And a pleasure. I've one matter to take care of first, then I'll pick you up at your room and escort you."

She sighed just so. "That's *much* better. That gives me more time to work on you. Go ahead and eat."

She was, Gabriel mused, very charming, and one of the most dexterous liars he had ever met. He had been inclined to think at first, because of her pretty face, that she was stupid. She was canny and daring and dangerous. She was also mystifying, and predatory.

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And—thank heavens—she was near-sighed. That was important.

BY TELEPHONE, Gabriel heard that the Lloyd's agent was a man named Clements Leeds, who was associated with the Atlantic Limited office on Frederick Street near Marine Square. But Mr. Leeds wasn't it.

Gabriel explained what he wanted in the way of coverage, the policy to be in force during his trip south on the *Apeldoorn,* during his stay in Rio, and during his flight back to the United States.

The office said that Mr. Leeds would get in touch with him later in the day.

"I expect to be away most of the day," Gabriel said. "How about tonight?"

"Very well, Mr. Adams. I'll give the details to Mr. Leeds when he comes in."

Gabriel was satisfied.

He locked his room and found Letti Gaynor's on the same floor and knocked. She opened it instantly, wide-eyed. "So soon? I thought you'd take a long time."

"I'm ready to go," Gabriel said. "Have you anything in mind or would you rather leave it to me?"

"Always leave it to a man," she said. "But take me out of Port of Spain. I've seen enough of it. I've seen the Savannah, and the Government House and the Customs House—"

"You haven't been 'Over the Saddle' in this short time," he interrupted. "Suppose I hire a car and drive us out. And you omitted the Botanic Gardens, which you ought to see. We'll stop there on the way home. It's getting late now. I don't know how far we can go."

They went far enough, taking the road south out of the city into the sugar field country.

Gabriel drove slowly, and it grew late. They returned at five, turned in the car, and then took a trolley back to the Savannah where they entered the Botanic Garden, spurned the offer of a guide, and wandered along the footpaths. The greenhouse orchids were in bloom and looked gorgeous.

They left here and followed a stream through a cool ravine where Letti finally paused, still holding his hand which she had been swinging. "Gabriel, you've been very nice to me."

"How would you have me be?" he said.

"No, but you have. I expect I acted like a young fool this morning. But it was good to see you. And it was so sweet of you to take care of me. I get frantic by myself, I can't stand to be alone. That's why I'd like you to come on the *Rosa* with me. You could get a cabin and switch your luggage."

Gabriel regarded her with cool passivity and did not reply.

"Please," she whispered. "Be nice to me." She reached up and pulled his face down so calmly and firmly that she took him unawares, and she kissed him on the mouth.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

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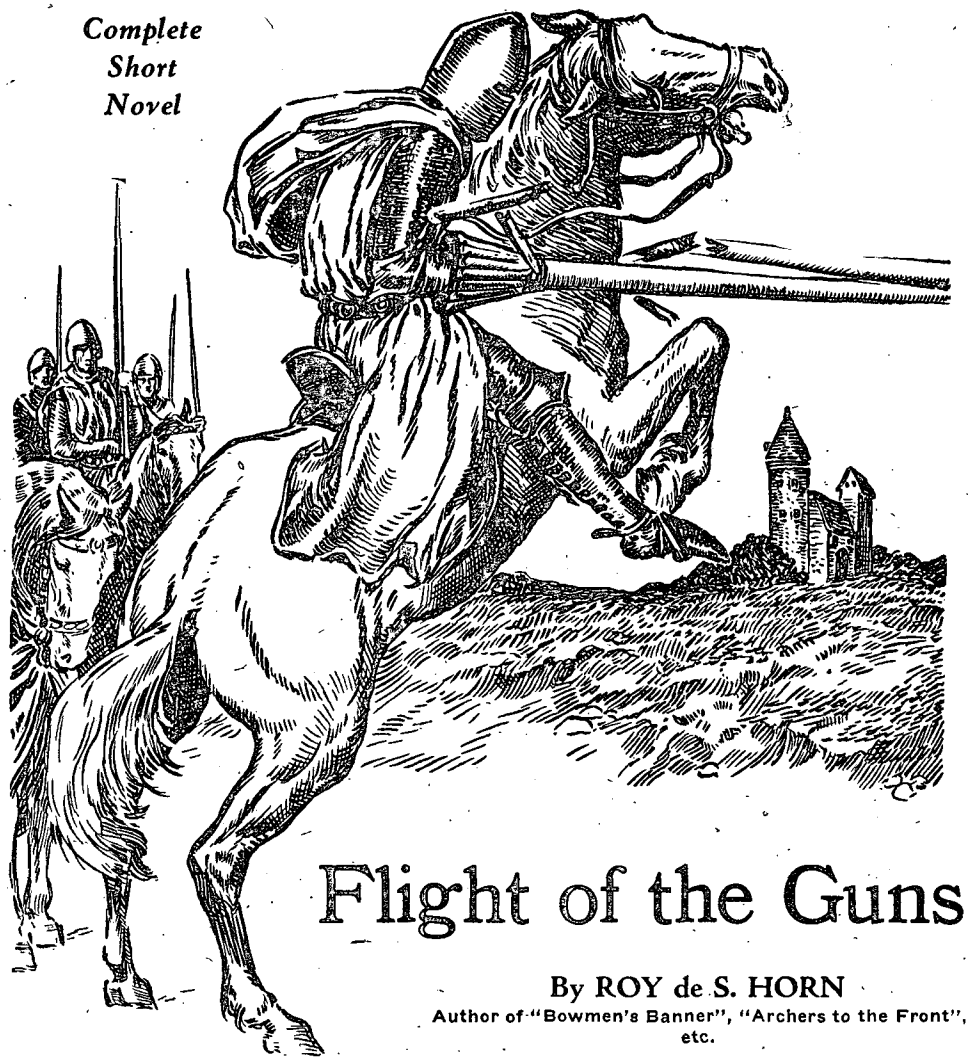
Complete Short Novel



Flight of the Guns

By ROY de S. HORN

Author of "Bowmen's Banner", "Archers to the Front", etc.

Today the English men-at-arms win a dubious glory by fire and pillage. But tomorrow only the Devil's weapons of these six bombardiers can answer the challenge of France . . .

CHAPTER I

FLAMING NORMANDY

FROM Barfluer to Liseux in Normandy is four-score miles and ten, pleasant miles they may be in mid-July with the villeins toiling in the fields, the grain rippling in the breeze, and the apple trees bursting with late bloom and young fruit.

Yet Normandy was anything but lovely in this mid-July of 1346. For every blooming tree and peaceful ville that lay ahead, a pile of embers and a pall of smoke lay behind. Between Edward III of England and his cousin, King Philip of France there had risen a conflict over the provinces of Normandy, Guienne, and Aquitaine. Whereat Edward had landed at St. Vaast de la Hogue with full twenty thousand

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On that battle ground England's champion met the French knight in furious combat

knights, men-at-arms, archers, and pikemen, and now was raiding the deep heart of France, burning and ravaging as he marched.

In three columns over a front of twenty miles the English marched, like destroying locusts. And that they might widen the path of their plague, they threw out on the sides a swarm of hobilars, light-armed men a-horseback.

Even the knights and squires and men-at-arms thought it no shame to over-ride and slay the dumb, bewildered Norman villeins of the fields, to lay the torch to peaceful villages and peasants' roof-trees.

Alone in all that horde of destruction, one small band of Englishmen marched and had no part in it. Well to the fore rolled and rumbled a half-dozen heavy carts on creaking wheels, while on either flank marched a score of seasoned archers, strung bowstave in hand, quiver and buckler at shoulder, short knife belted at side.

In the foremost cart Wat the Armorer, broad of shoulder and brawny of arm despite the fifty years that had grizzled his hair, turned with a perplexed frown to the youth that rode the cart seat beside him.

"Fire, murder, and destruction—my eyes are sickened of the sight. If this be war, Robin, why seek we not the Frenchman's knights and men-at-arms, or lay siege to his castles and strong points, rather than slay and burn where only defenseless villeins bide?"

Robin Santerre's eyes, too, were sickened, and a frown furrowed his high forehead that was more a scholar's than a soldier's.

"If I had known that such was war, I would have bethought me twice before leaving the honest halls of Oxford for this

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service. Pestle and mortar and books of the philosophers are more to my liking than blood and pillage.

"Yet I had thought—I had even hoped—that in these new bombards and their amazing powder might lie the end of all such burning and slaying. But look: Ahead of us lies a ridge, and beyond that ridge lies no man knows what.

"When we reach the crest it might be well that we halted and looked to our bombards and their chargings, that we run not afoul of just such ambush as was nigh our undoing at Caen."

IN TRUTH, when they topped the ridge, Robin's prudence seemed well advised. For there, directly before them, lay a swift and brawling stream pinched between sheer, rocky banks; sharp-toothed boulders ripped its waters into raging rapids.

On the left side of the stream lay a cluster of thatch-roofed houses, a small community that was unwalled and now seemingly deserted. On the other bank, however, and all but circled by the snarling rapids, upreared a rocky peak. And on its very pinnacle, like an eagle's aerie, nested a frowning castle.

But the castle's drawbridge was updrawn, moving helmets and pike-points glinted atop its battlements, and from its lofty keep the banner of the castle's lord fluttered a sullen defiance.

"Aye, you are right. Another Caen, mayhap," muttered the armorer, and halted for the remaining carts to come up.

Swiftly then, Robin Santerre leaped from his seat. As master-artilleryman and captain of bombards, he went along the wagons, dropping the tail-gates, inspecting the bombards. He tested the stone balls seated in the muzzles, the powder beneath the touch-holes, made sure that the firing skewer in each glowing brazier was red-hot and ready for instant use.

From the other carts clambered down three men. One was a giant, red-headed and as freckled as a pied piper; the second a lean, scarred, grizzled man as gaunt as a gray wolf; and the last an agile fellow of no more years than Robin's own twenty. They each wore the habiliments and bore the weapons of archers.

"How now—how ride the bombards?" inquired Robin.

Red Hubert grinned and spat. "Well enough, eh, Old Wolf?"

John the Wolf scowled. "Nay, the roughness jostled me around until my insides are all but addled."

Peter Joy, the youngest, chuckled. "Our Wolf hath ever a sour temper. But give him a French lord to catch for ransom, and he will smile soon enough."

"Small chance for that, when these accursed knights and hobilars sweep clean even the pig-sties before we bombardiers e'en glimpse them," snarled John the Wolf. "If I had a horse I might fare better. But see—they ride into this Frenchmen's town before we scarcely more than sight it."

In truth, a party of full-armed knights and men-at-arms had come in sight on the left and was even now a-gallop toward the deserted village. Right after them came a yelping band of hobilars from the right who, at sight of the houses ahead, let out a shout and raced down with pike-points glittering.

"A fair race—and the devil take the hobilars!" Red Hubert grinned. "But see, they draw rein. And scant wonder. For if my eyes see aright, that black knight at the head of the others is none else than the Prince!"

Unmistakable indeed was the swart shield and armor of that Prince of Wales who was ever afterward to be known as the Black Prince. Open-helmed, rising in his stirrups and shouting like a boy, he led the charge upon the village. His was the eager hand that set torch to the first roof-tree, his the excited voice that shouted orders to knights and squires. For Edward of Woodstock was scant sixteen, making his first foray into hostile country, and all aflame with the zest and excitement of it.

Wat the Armorer shook his head. "Setting fire to a villein's roof-thatch is small honor to the Prince of all England. It had brought him greater honor had he challenged, instead, that great perching castle yon, where

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there might be blows received as well as given. But no—they fire the villein's roof and ride wide of yon Norman lord's stronghold."

BUT not quite was this true. For, leaving the flaming village, the Prince's party rode to the very stream edge where the stout wooden bridge, port-cullised at the castle end, led across the rushing stream.

But the drawbridge was open and portcullis dropped, and after waving defiant lances toward the stern battlements, the English knights contented themselves with firing the near end of the bridge and then riding on for further quarry.

"Said I not so?" demanded the Armorer. "E'en as at Barfleur, they rein full wide of stone nuts that may prove hard to crack."

"They have done us some good turn anyway," said Robin. "With the bridge fired, the Frenchmen in yon castle cannot sally out to cut us and our archers to pieces. But now we may even march on past the village."

"Past where the village stood, you mean," grunted John the Wolf. "Already the hobilars are at it, like the scavengers they are."

When they creaked down the slope and neared the houses, they saw that the grizzled archer had spoken aright. For the hobilars, some dismounted and some still a-horse, were dashing here and there, gutting the place of any belonging left behind by the villagers in their hurried flight, and laying the torch to every roof as yet unfired. Most eager among them was their leader, a dark, evil-faced man at sight of whom Red Hubert let out an oath.

"Will o' the Fens, or I never glimpsed yon varlet before! And changed from archer to hobilar!"

"Aye. Murder and pillage besuits him better than an honest archer's bow and quiver," grunted Wat the Armorer. "Sir Allen Mayne and his Masterless Men are well rid of him."

John the Wolf's gaunt jowls quivered wrathfully. "It irks me sorely to see the varlet a-horse and hence earning six pence pay a day as hobilar, when we honest archers and bombardiers earn but three. I have half a mind to sting him with a cloth-yard shaft."

"An one good French bowman lay hid in yon village, Will o' the Fens would not be so free with the torch," said Peter Joy. "One bowman could riddle half a dozen of yon hobilars ere they could drop torch for blade or pike."

His tone had something of regret in it, for between Will o' the Fens and the bombardiers there was no love lost. And reasonably enough, since, but a few days before, Will o' the Fens had almost got them all gibbeted by the army's constables for the matter of a ransomed Frenchman's purse.

CHAPTER II

THE KING'S BUZZARDS

HOWEVER, it seemed that every able-bodied Frenchman had abandoned the village in full flight, for the hobilars pillaged and burned without hindrance. And foremost with the torch was Will o' the Fens and another great hulking hobilar of loud voice whose rose beside the leader.

Yet not completely deserted was the village, for all at once from out of a hut that had just been fired, hobbled a withered crone. She was bent with age and in rags, yet she beat at the fire with feeble hands and screamed curses on the hobilars.

At that the hulking hobilar beside Will cursed, and turning his horse, spurred with cruel force upon the crone. So quick was the rush that she could not hobble aside. Struck by the charging horse and man, she spun and fell beneath the horse's hoofs, and lay thereafter writhing and screaming, her shrill voice ringing above the roar of the flames and the shouts of the hobilars. But instead of dealing quick punishment to the offending hobilar, Will o' the Fens merely sat his saddle and let out a great laugh.

At that Robin's face went white, and even the Armorer's lips grew tense. Red Hubert let out an oath and plucked a long goose-feathered shaft from the quiver at his back.

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"Now that was an evil deed. For a woman is e'er a woman, even though she be Norman and not English. What say you of the distance, Old Wolf? A full two hundred paces, or perhaps an even score beyond?"

"Two hundred and a score, and forget not a half-pace for windage," answered John the Wolf, likewise notching arrow to bow. "Do you take the hobilar, and I will choose me Will o' the Fens."

But vengeance from another source overtook the hulking hobilar even before the red-headed archer could loose his shaft. For all at once from out the burning hut bounded an unarmed figure.

A plunging fury, this one.

With the second bound he was at the hobilar's side, and before that amazed rider could turn, had gripped him by the leg. And so mighty was the jerk that the rider seemed fairly to fly from his saddle, to land in the dust with a thud. As swift as a terrier upon a rat, the newcomer was upon him, worrying him. The downed hobilar's voice rose in a shrill shout of fright, then the shout broke suddenly into a horrid cry, and was stilled.

So sudden was the attack that Will o' the Fens and the other hobilars had sat their saddles mute and amazed. Now they broke into shouts, curses, reined their mounts and strove to over-ride the Frenchman.

But he was unarmed no longer. Snatching the sword from the dead hobilar's side, he laid about him with great blows, bounding and twisting until the hobilars found their very numbers a disadvantage. Their blows and thrusts fell upon one another rather than upon their intended victim. So that their horses began rearing and plunging furiously.

But, Robin had not waited to see the end of all this. Leaping into his cart's seat, he seized whip and reins and belabored the cart horses until they broke into a frantic run down the slope, the bombard cart bouncing and clattering at their heels, while behind rattled the other carts with the archer escort racing alongside.

NOT long could one man hold out against so many, however; and even as Robin drove up, two hobilars, wiser than the rest, had dropped reins and pikes and leaped from their saddles down upon the lone Frenchman.

Even so, and hurled to earth as he was, he continued to twist and struggle until other hobilars swarmed upon him and so buried him beneath their bodies that he was unable even to move.

"Bind his arms and ankles!" ordered Will o' the Fens, his face purple with anger.

While this was being done, one of the hobilars knelt beside the rider who had been pulled from his horse.

"Dead as a smelt! And small wonder, for his neck is all but twisted into a knot!"

At that Will o' the Fens swung down from his horse, drew his sword, and advanced upon the bound and helpless prisoner who was staring up with anger and defiance and no fear.

Holding the naked blade before the prisoner's eyes, the leader of the hobilars gave a snarl. "Then let us see how thy neck will withstand an English edge. And thou should hold thyself lucky that we do not cast thee into the flames alive."

"And when that blade falls, so will this one also upon thine own fat neck!" Robin, who had leaped down from his cart and pushed his way through the crowd, had his own sword out. Robin's eyes shone with such fiery anger that Will o' the Fens stumbled back. Behind Robin came Wat the Armorer, his great hand on his sword-hilt.

But seeing only the two of them, and enraged at the interference, Will o' the Fens found heart and whirled around to his hobilars. "Out sword, and cut them down! Over-ride them!"

"That is somewhat easier in the saying than in the doing!" said a new voice.

Red Hubert stood erect on the cart seat, his bowstring full drawn and the barb of the arrow covering the leader of hobilars. John the Wolf and Peter Joy, in their own carts, likewise had shafts nocked

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and the bowstrings taut against the ear.

Without turning his head, Red Hubert called to them, "Do thou take the one beyond Will, Old Wolf—and Peter, you take the next."

"Nay, I will ne'er draw shaft again an' I not spit at least three of these varlets," growled the grizzled archer. "And Tyrrel here and his men should be good for at least two each. Eh, Tyrrel?"

At that the leader of the archer escort, who was panting from the speed of his running, nocked his own arrow to string.

"Thou wert ever a greedy old wolf, John. There will not be two apiece left for us, an' thou take three for thyself. We will spit these hobilars until they sprout more shafts than a hedgehog sprouts quills!"

Seeing a full score and more of shafts aimed at them, and knowing that every archer could drop his deer at two hundred paces, the hobilars began to give back, muttering among themselves. Yet there was still a surliness among them, which occasioned other words from the armorer.

"If clothyard shafts have no meaning for you, we still have the bombards ready for firing. So get you gone before we unloose them upon you!"

AT THAT there was no further hesitancy among the hobilars. For though not one in ten among the army knew the secret of this strange new artillery that cast great stone balls with vomiting fire and thunder, it was well bruited abroad that they were engines of the Devil's own making, against which not even mailed knights or barbican walls could stand.

Riders crossed themselves and muttered prayers to the saints, casting frightened glances toward the bombard carts, and then put spur to their mounts as they placed what distance they might between themselves and such fearsome engines. Only Will o' the Fens delayed, his rage overcoming his fear.

"Ye shall not free this Frenchman entirely from me! With one twist of his hands he brake the neck of Allard here, the stoutest man of my troop. E'en the Lord Constable would assess him death for that!"

"Nay," said Robin, "for the Constable's orders are that all unarmed villeins shall be brought in unhurt, for the building of the roads the seige train must use. And such a stout Frenchman as this should be greater worth than a half dozen dumb villeins of the fields." He nodded to Red Hubert. "Cut his ankles loose, Hubert, and stand him on his feet."

With one sweep of his knife, Red Hubert cut the cord that bound the prisoner's ankles, still leaving his wrists lashed for safety. Wat the Armorer had meanwhile bent over the limp form of the old crone. He arose, shaking his head.

"She is with the the saints now, if it be that these French have saints. And clean flame is better than a hasty burying." So saying he lifted the scrawny body and gently thrust it into the leaping pyre of the hut.

The prisoner, however, had waited for no help, but had scrambled to his feet of his own accord. And now he stood, a stocky man of shoulder-breadth equaling even the giant Hubert's. His face was dark and rough-featured even to ugliness; his curious greenish eyes met Robin's without fear. So that Robin could not forbear a grunt of admiration as he turned to the hobilar leader.

"Take him back, then, to the master road-builder. An' he arrive not there alive, it will be to thy ill luck as well as his."

"Aye, and more than that," growled Red Hubert. "I shall come looking on the morrow. An' he have even so much as a sword-cut on him, hobilar, your own carcass shall receive a like gash, but of just twice the length and depth!"

Then as the scowling hobilar rode away, driving the Frenchman ahead of him, the giant archer grumbled: "It would be better deed, methinks, even now to spit yon hobilar with a shaft, than to let him go."

Robin shook his head wearily. "There has been enough, and to spare, of killing. And since the sun is low, we would do well to drive only a little further along the stream, and then make camp."

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Recapturing the reins, he whipped the tired horses up, with the other carts clattering after. So heartsick was he at the thought of the old crone's trampling, that he did not notice that John the Wolf had not resumed the driver's seat in the third bombard cart.

Instead, with a grin and a grunt, John had given the reins over to Tyrrel. Then, hopping lightly from the cart, the gaunt archer had vanished quickly amid the flaring roof-thatches and half-consumed walls of the village. Nor did he rejoin his cart until long after the others had already lighted the cookfires for the evening meal.

ON THE morrow, however, they found a new and severe hindrance to their progress. For here the road wound among the lowlands and at times amid marshes fed by the stream's overflow. Even footmen and horsemen found the going difficult, and for the heavy baggage carts and other wagons of the train the road was completely impassable.

Picking his way gingerly amid the mire, Robin shook his head. "There is naught to do but wait in camp until the engineers have bridged a way. Our heavy bombard carts would sink to the hubs within a half-league."

"And that would suit our lords and knights, like Butcher de Breen, full well," said Wat the Armorer. "They have no love for these bombards, seeing that, if the weapons prove themselves in this war, bombards and bombardiers may well displace that cumbersome armor of which these clanking knights are so proud. Even Sir John Chandos hath held that bombards have no place in the field, but should march only with the engines of siege in the train."

Robin was silent a long moment, his forehead knitted in thought. "Nay, the fault lies not in the bombards but in these heavy carts. Could we dispense with the carts completely, and merely fasten wheels onto the bombard sledges directly, we could go where any full-armed horseman could go. And that is an idea that is deserving of thought. But here come the *gynours*, for the bridging of this mire."

He pointed.

The engineers from the train in the rear were indeed coming up, bringing with them teams and carts, axes and rope and mauls, all the tools of their craft. Surveying the marshy road with keen, professional eye, the master *gynour* promptly set men to work, felling trees, gathering rocks, laying them side by side in the mire to form solid footing over which even the heavy baggage wagons and siege engines might cross.

These were valuable men indeed.

Now, too the reason for the Constable's orders about bringing in prisoners was apparent. Guarded and driven by armed bowmen and pikemen, great droves of French peasants were herded forward and set to felling trees and dragging rocks and timbers toward the low spots. Watching which, Wat the Armorer gave a sour grunt. In disgust he said:

"Now again I say that this war is but an evil and unfair thing. The Magna Carta, on which we English set such store, hath it plainly writ that no English freeman may be set to *corvee*—to forced labor—nor other work without reasonable pay. And this is right.

"Yet we force these poor French villeins to felling of trees and dragging of rocks, with no more pay than a whip lash across the shoulders."

"Yet it hath ever been held in war that a captured enemy is at the full command and mercy of the captor, to do whatever he is bid," replied Robin.

"Aye, but when at Caen we captured the high and mighty Count d'Eu," retorted the Armorer, "was he put to felling trees and dragging rocks, with a whiplash across his back if he was lazy at the task? Nay, his bed and sup were of the finest, and he was even called cousin by our own Lord Constable, the great Earl of Northampton. For the rules of war are made by earls and counts and kings. When common, honest freemen like ourselves make the rules—But, hola! Who is this I see?"

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CHAPTER III

ARCHER ON HORSEBACK

FOLLOWING his glance, Robin glimpsed a stocky prisoner of tremendous breath of shoulder and ugly features who was straining at the thick butt of a green log. Then as the powerful shoulder muscles bulged, the heavy log lifted and fell into place with a loud thud.

Robin turned with curiosity to the English archer who stood guard with sword and strung bowstave. "How toils this stout Frenchman here? For meseems he hath the strength of three."

The guard grounded the end of his bowstave and scratched his head. "The strength of three, aye— and the surliness of six! I but rapped him with the end of my stave a moment agone, and he turned on me with such glare and scowl that I was glad I was a bow-length away."

"Art affrighted of an unarmed French villein, then?" inquired Robin. "That were shame to all English bowmen."

The archer scratched his head again, and then grinned. "Nay, it was not fear of him alone that moved me, but fear of a great, red-thatched archer of our own army who bespoke me this early morning.

"He gave me warning, did this great redhead, that did I so much as make gash or even bruise on this Frenchman's carcass he himself would do double-damage to mine own. And to add meaning to his words, this giant red-thatch squeezed my neck with but his thumb and fingers. My wizen is sore from the squeezing yet."

Robin knew that Red Hubert had been as good as his word.

Leaving the engineers and their prisoners, Robin and the Armorer returned to their own camp beside the rapids a small distance away.

But no sooner had they come in easy sight, than they both stopped dead still. And after a moment's sight, they both broke out into laughter.

In a little open space away from the bombard carts, Red Hubert and Peter Joy and John the Wolf were struggling with a plunging horse. Red Hubert and Peter Joy stood on either side, heels dug into earth and holding back with all their strength on two ropes that fastened to the horse's neck.

Alongside the horse John the Wolf dodged and twisted, letting out great oaths as he vainly tried to mount by means of the surcingle and looped straps he had knotted around the animal in lieu of saddle. Yet despite the two ropes that stretched his neck, the horse—a black, mettlesome animal with rolling eyes and back-thrown ears —plunged and kicked and twisted so that the gaunt archer had much ado to hold on. The dirt and tatters of his doublet and jerkin showed that John the Wolf had already mounted at least once, only to be as swiftly thrown.

"Now what knight's warhorse has this thievish John stolen?" inquired Robin as he ceased his laughing. "For assuredly such a mettlesome steed is more a knight's charger than a villein's plow horse!"

At that moment the animal had ceased plunging for a moment in order to regain his wind. Snatching the surcingle, John the Wolf was scrambling up and atop his back, digging his toes into the stirrup loops and yelling with triumph.

HIS triumph, however, lasted no longer than his first shout. With a bawl of anger at being so tricked, the horse went into such a fury of plunges and twists as made his previous efforts seem like kitten's play. The first plunge threw the dismayed rider forward on the mane and neck; the second dumped him spinning off and to the side.

At that Red Hubert and Peter Joy set up great shouts of jeering laughter, but they threw their full weight on the neck ropes anew to prevent the horse running free. The next instant their laughter changed to cries of alarm.

For in his fall John the Wolf, although freed of one stirrup loop, had become entangled of the other. And now with his head and shoulders in the dirt, he hung by the tangle foot, howling and vainly

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clawing to free his heel from the surcingle loop.

Nor was that all. With a great rear and plunge, the kicking brute had jerked one tie-rope completely loose from Peter Joy's surprised hands. Then as Red Hubert dug in his heels and set his great strength and body to the test, that rope snapped, sending Red Hubert spinning backward on the ground. Freed of the ropes, the horse whirled on his heels, and started to race wildly from the spot, his speed the more furious because of the bouncing, yelling thing that hung at his side.

"Quick, Wat! Catch him, catch him!" yelled Robin. "John's brains will be shattered out against the rocks." With the words he turned and raced toward the left to head off the horse which was plunging their way.

At sight of him, the animal curveted and circled to the right, where Wat the Armorer waited. With a desperate lunge the Armorer managed to lay hand to the surcingle, only to have it jerked from his fingers by another twisting plunge of the steed.

Then while Robin and the Armorer stood impotent, the horse, with John the Wolf still dragging from its stirrup loop, headed straight toward the spot where the *gynours* and the captives labored.

"Now is it in truth the end of John the Wolf," gasped the Armorer hoarsely. "For yon logs and rocks will crash his skull like an egg-shell. And naught but an arrow could overtake yon devil-brute now!"

"But an arrow may yet do it! An arrow may yet do it!" cried Robin with sudden hope. "See—Hubert and Peter are running for heir bow and quivers."

"Too late!" groaned the Armorer. "The horse is all but into the rocks and logs now."

Then in that instant when all hope seemed gone, an unexpected thing happened.

OUT from among the dazed guards and captives, rushed a bare-headed figure. His dark locks flying, his long arms outstretched, the Frenchman of the blazing hut raced toward man and horse.

He shouted in strange words as he ran. And amazingly enough the shouts seemed to distract the animal so that it pulled up short, even hesitated before resuming its flight.

That slight hesitation was enough. With that same tiger bound with which he had attacked the hobilar, the Frenchman was at the horse's head. One of the long arms seized its muzzle, its foaming nostrils, jerked it down and around. Then the other hand reached back and jerked at the entangling stirrup-loop. With the second jerk the imprisoned foot came free, and John the Wolf dropped with a dull thud to the dirt.

"Now by my hilt, if Wolf John be still alive, I vow a full score of tapers of purest wax to the altar of St. Thomas in Bewly," exclaimed Wat the Armorer, "For, rude and sour-spoken as he is, yet John hath ever been a good friend and a stout archer when arrows fly."

"Nor must we forget this Frenchman," added Robin softly. "For it was his quickness that saved John the Wolf. I will speak to Sir Allan Mayne, to see if telling of this deed to the Lord Constable may win for this Frenchman the freedom that he merits."

He started hurrying toward the archer, thinking that at the very least they would have broken bones to mend. But amazingly enough, rugged John was already hobbling to his feet, feeling of this limb and then that. After which he began to utter such a great bellow of curses as no man with a damaged skull could have bethought him.

Then from the Armorer, striding behind, came a surprised grunt, and a dry chuckle. "Nay, there is no need now to put in word with the Lord Constable for this Frenchman. For luck, the villein is even now attending to that little matter himself!"

Even as Robin looked, the Frenchman with startling swiftness had caught up the dragging neck-rope, looped it around the

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horse's muzzle and then his own left wrist. Then at a single bound and without even touching stirrup loop, he was astride the horse. He spun the animal around on its haunches. Disdaining to toe the stirrups, he drummed the steed's ribs with his heels, at the same time fetching him a great blow athwart his rump.

And before the dazed guards could reach for weapons, prisoner and horse were racing away across the uneven ground, clearing rocks and logs with mighty leaps.

"Now truly yon is a stout villein, e'en though he be a Frenchman and our enemy," exclaimed Wat the Armorer admiringly. "It is sad to see such a fearless man ride to his death. For see, he rides straight for the river which no man could hope to swim, even an he survive the leap from yonder rocky bank!"

"Even should he enter the swift water alive, there is yet the crossing to be done," agreed Robin. "For Hubert and Peter Joy have bow in hand and arrows already notched, and they are deadly sure at twice the distance."

BY NOW the rider was charging with unabated speed to the very brink of the high rocks that rose almost sheer from the river's edge. Without so much as a backward glance, and with only a yell and a pull of the neck rope to lift the animal's head, the Frenchman hurtled from the rock, out and toward the boulder-studded rapids beneath. Robin's breath caught in his throat, as he strained his eyes for a glimpse of emerging horse or man.

And then he let out the pent-up breath in a little sigh. Far out in the foaming rapids a black shape had emerged, and then another. Swimming beside the struggling steed and guiding him by stirrup and neck-rope, the Frenchman was urging him on with encouraging shouts.

The guards came out of their daze then, and rushed toward the bank. But even as they gained it and notched their shafts, horse and man had scrambled out onto the farther bank. Bounding once more onto the animal's back, the Frenchman gave one last defiant shout, and the next moment was vanishing into the fringing forest.

Wat the Armorer shook his head, and spat. "If all the French knights and men-at-arms show as stout heart as this one villein, then our work is well cut out for us, I wot."

Robin's brow was wrinkled and thoughtful. "Didst note the way he rode without stirrups, and mounted at a single bound? It is strange that a villein of the fields should ride so well. And equal strange that a villein's plow horse should prove so mettlesome. I have a desire to inquire of John Wolf where he got such an animal."

But the gaunt archer, groaning and grunting as he counted the full meed of his scratches and bruises, only grinned sheepishly at the question.

"Had I known that it was Satan's own horse, I would have let him burn to his bones ere I led him out. But glancing at the crone's hut, yester-eve, while you were bickering with hobilars, I did glimpse a little shed built onto it behind, and through a crack of the shed this horse's tail waving. So I did but creep back and lead him out, and hide him behind yonder woody copse until this morn."

Wat the Armorer scowled. "How now, art tired of being an honest bombardier and wouldst turn plundering hobilar?"

John the Wolf grinned even more sheepishly. "Nay, but it seemed a shame to leave all findings to these hobilars for no reason save they ride horseback and uncover all the loot before we men afoot can even come up.

"I did but reckon on keeping the animal to hand so that I might ride about and so perchance uncover some little thing before the hobilars. Not two days agone, so I heard, Will o' the Fens did catch a fleeing mercer with purse containing no less than twenty gold nobles."

"Hereafter you were better off to leave horses and pillage to the hobilars, and keep to thy bombard and archer's arrows," said Robin, laughing. "But how comes it, Hubert, that you loosed not a single shaft

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at the Frenchman, e'n though he rode within half arrow-flight? And you too, Peter Joy?"

Red Hubert scratched his carroty noggin and closed one eye. "In truth I could not say. Except that when I drew shaft on the villein's back I could see naught but this howling old Wolf here, kicking and bounding; and so, strangely enough, my fingers would not let go their hold upon the shaft."

Peter Joy, too, looked somewhat embarrassed. "Even as Hubert says, my shaft refused to fly. But that may be because I had not even nocked it, much less drawn taut the string."

CHAPTER IV

SABLE CHAMPION

FOR two days the *gynours* toiled in the mire before they made the road solid enough for footing. Then once more Robin set his bombard carts a-rolling, and so creaked across the marsh and into the higher country on the farther side. And once again the army spread out over the fair land, harrying and burning.

But now the Armorer's words seemed to have been spoken with omen, for no longer did the raiders burn with impunity. A band of hobilars, riding carelessly into a seemingly deserted village, found a wolf-trap instead. Riddled with quarrels from hidden crossbowmen, and then over-ridden and cut to pieces by sudden charge of mailed horsemen concealed behind the houses, they were lucky to ride back with one-tenth their original number.

The news was brought to the bombadiers by Sir Allan Mayne himself, the captain of the Masterless Men of whom the archer escort was part. The young knight's face was aglow with excitement as he recounted the occurrence.

"Now we may find braver work for our swords than fleshing them on witless villeins of the fields. For rumor hath it that the leader of the ambuscade was none other than Bertrand du Guesclin, than whom there is no stouter knight in all France."

"Du Guesclin!" exclaimed Robin. "Then I am glad the Prince set you and the Masterless Men from the New Forest to be our escort, in place of the Butcher de Brenn. For sooner would the Butcher see us bombardiers cut to bits by this Du Guesclin than saved by any effort of his own."

Sir Allan's face clouded. "De Brenn is not the only baron in our force who hates these bombards and their vomiting stone balls, for the hurt they may do to chivalry. But I think you, as well as my own forest men, may nurse your hate for de Brenn too well. As Lord Warden of the New Forest, it was Baron de Brenn's duty to render swift punishment to aught who poached the King's deer."

"And never did the gibbet chains clank such constant music as when the Butcher ruled the Forest!" said Wat the Armorer tartly. "But, since you are our escort captain, what post in the army has the Butcher now? An advanced and dangerous one, I hope."

"He hath been put in full charge of all the hobilars," answered Sir Allan, laughing.

"And for once a fitting post!" retorted the Armorer. "For pillage and plunder is more to the Butcher's liking, methinks, than honest battle. He will be one of a feather with Will o' the Fens and these other murdering hobilars."

AT THAT moment a thudding of hooves and a rattle and clanking or armor told of a new arrival on their flanks. A troop of almost two score full-mailed knights and squires was coming up at a gallop. Seeing the golden field and scarlet pile on the shield of the leader, Robin recognized him at a glance as Sir John Chandos, reckoned as the best soldier in all England. Reining up before the creaking bombard carts, the scarred veteran waved a greeting to Sir Allan.

"You are well come, Sir Allan, with these carts. I am minded for a little time to ride not over-far from these bombards. For I wot that they may make excellent bait for the Frenchmen. Bait that might trap

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Bertrand du Guesclin into fair encounter. And I would deem it greater glory to cross blades with this Du Guesclin than with any other knight in all Christendom!"

"And may that glory be all thine and none of mine," muttered Red Hubert who had come up just in time to overhear. "Bait for the Frenchmen—bah!"

Robin turned in quick alarm lest the words have reached the ears of Sir John Chandos who was as noted for his quick temper as for his deeds of arms. But Sir John had already put spurs to his mount and was galloping off to the east, his whole troop clattering at his heels.

Sir Allan's face was sober, however, as he turned back to Robin.

"You would be well advised if you set double-watch hereafter, and marched with bombards full charged and braziers lighted. For this du Guesclin is a doughty fighter, even as Sir John hath said, and gives little mercy to any Englishman he catches. When our supports reached the village where he ambushed the hobilars, they found no wounded there—only dead hobilars strung by their necks from ridge-poles and eaves."

"And mercy enough for hobilars, if Will o' the Fens is fair example," grunted Wat the Armorer. "I would have cast him alive to burn in the crone's hut, had I been Frenchman and he fallen prisoner into my hands."

Nevertheless they marched with redoubled caution after that. And well it was they did, for blow after blow the Frenchmen now struck, on this flank first, and then the other, making swift assaults and then riding away before stronger forces could come up to withstand them.

Alarm that was almost panic ran along the army, and it was rumored that the French were in league with the Devil himself. For had not three good Wessex knights been found pinned inside their armor, pierced through hauberk and burgeon and even shield itself by great four-foot shafts, yet not so much as a catapult or placement had been found in the place of ambuscade afterward?

So on the fourth day, finding before them another smokeless, deserted little village, Robin drew up his lead cart and rallied all the others around him.

"Look closely to bombards and braziers," he called to Red Hubert and Peter Joy and John the Wolf. "An we be bait, just such an innocent place as this would be well set for a trap."

"Nay," pointed out Wat the Armorer, "for see, yonder come Sir John Chandos and his men-at-arms in full sight. If there be any Frenchmen ambuscade in yon village, they will take caution at the sight and unspring the trap while they may yet flee."

"If trap it be, then better it is for us to bide here till Sir John's horsemen have unset the teeth," answered Robin prudently. Then he gave an exclamation. "And trap it truly was!"

FROM out the silent village ahead had suddenly ridden a compact little group of strange horsemen. Not more than a score in number were they, yet they advanced a little way and halted, lances in rest, as if fearless of Sir John's double force. These latter, at sight of the Frenchmen, gave loud shouts and set spurs to their chargers.

"Trap it may be, but its teeth will tear the Frenchmen's hides, and not ours," grunted Wat the Armorer. "Sir John's double score will make short shrift of them in the melee."

"I like it not," said Robin. "Quick! Swing the carts around till each bombard bears to the front. Then drop the tail gates and make sure that each firing skewer is red-hot and sputtering!"

But at that moment, from out the little troop of Frenchmen rode a single horseman. Full armed he was, from crested haume to solleret and spurs. Yet no hint of pennon fluttered at his lance tip, nor so much as a single device flaunted from his rich surcoat or breasted shield. Sable of arms and sable of steed, he sat there, a solitary and challenging figure, with none of his troop nearer than a dozen lance-lengths.

Seeing this, Sir John Chandos gave signal for his own followers to halt, and him-

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self rode out alone in the van. Robin could hear the knight's voice calling to his squire.

"My eyesight is not as keen as it one-time was, Peyton, for I can not read this Frenchman's blazoning. Yet it is evident that he challenges to single combat, which is proof that he is thirsty for honor even as ourselves." And then he raised his voice eagerly. "Before we ride this course, Sir Knight, I would fain know thy name and title, for the greater glory of the tilt."

But the sable-armed Frenchman made no reply except to settle himself more solidly in the saddle.

At Robin's ear, Red Hubert's voice came sour and scornful. "Enemy he knows the Frenchman is, what more does he ask? Why do they not get at their bickering and have done with it?"

But Sir John waited another moment, and then called again. "I would also ask thy choosing—whether we run a single tilt with the lance before the general melée, or battle to the *outrance,* with sword and ax as well as lance, and afoot as well as ahorse?"

Again there was no answer from the Frenchman, unless it was his significant loosening of the great battle-ax that hung thonged at his pommel.

However, Sir John seemed to find that answer enough, for his voice rose clear and content. "Now I could well love thee for that, Sir Knight, e'en though you keep secret your lineage. To the *outrance* then it is—and glory to him that can win it!"

HE SETTLED his lance firm in couch, dropped its point, and drove deep his spurs. The strange knight in sable was no less prompt. Fair between the two troops they met, with such a thunder-crash of hoofs on ground and steel on shield that it seemed no living man could withstand it.

Yet so true had each lance struck that they brake each in splinters and, though they reeled to the shock, each knight thundered on and past the other, only to jerk rein and whirl about at the end of the course. Casting aside their broken lances, they seized other weapons—Sir John his heavy, three-foot sword, the Frenchman his battle-ax.

Now they circled, stirrup to stirrup, dealing each other such buffets that the clang was like hammer on anvil. Yet so deft were they with blow and parry, and so evenly matched, that gashed shields and dented helms were the only visible signs of injury.

"Now if this be war, it is likewise foolishness, said Red Hubert testily. "That black charger's trappings fall to the fetlock, but I doubt me not that Peter and I and the Old Wolf here could sift an arrow through—or even between the rider's gusset-piece and burgeon. Then Sir John could make short work of the downed Frenchman. What say you, Old Wolf?"

"No shaft of mine will I loose, to lighten the blows on any knight's headpiece," growled John the Wolf. "Sir John would use us for bait, would he? Then let him gaff his own fish now that he has caught it. And a fighting fish this Frenchman is. Look, our man has already lost his shield!"

In truth, whether through accident or unusual force or cunning of blow, the Frenchman's ax had landed fairly at last, and with such strength that Sir John's shield was riven through from chief to foot, leaving the worthless halves a-dangle.

At that the remaining Frenchmen set up a yell of triumph which quickly changed to astonishment and dismay. For dropping the useless shield, Sir John had suddenly sprung from his saddle onto his opponent, clutching him around the neck and dragging him to the ground where they both rolled over and over, slashing at each other with both battle-ax and poniard.

As if that were a signal, the waiting English knights spurred their mounts and hurtled forward, lances glinting. The Frenchmen charged to meet them, so that they crashed in a turmoil of man and horse and steel wherein the individual fighters were instantly lost in clouds of dust.

Exciting as was the combat, however, Robin did not center his eyes wholly upon it, but kept them roving constantly, sus-

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piciously, over the terrain roundabout. Well it was that he did, for suddenly he started, gave a loud shout.

The sloping shoulder of a copsed hill a little way to the west had suddenly come a-bristle with gleam and glint of polished arms. And around the copse and over the hill-shoulder burst a full four score of Frenchmen. They hurtled triumphantly down upon the flank of the unsuspecting English knights.

DESPERATELY Robin shouted his orders. "Peter—Hubert—John! Quick to thy cart-wheels and slew them around! Point them to that low hut which marks the westward edge of the village. And that moment when you first glimpse horse and rider adown the bombard tube, thrust deep the firing skewers down the touch-holes! With good aim we may surprise yon Frenchmen e'en as they thought to surprise us!"

Even as he tugged at the wheel of his bombard cart, however, Wolf John let out a pleased chuckle. "Now mayhap our fire-eating Chandos may get his belly full of fighting, and more. He was over-quick to use us as bait, and now he is but the rat in the trap himself!"

"Hold tongue, fool, and save strength for thine own task!" retorted Red Hubert. "An these Frenchmen override our own knights, they will be upon us next!"

Already the oncharging French were nearly up to the spot Robin had chosen. Then, running his eyes along the cast tube of his own bombard, Robin saw the front wave of the horsemen surging past it. Jerking the redhot skewer from the brazier that the Armorer held, he plunged it into the touch-hole and deep into the powder beneath.

But to his amazement there came no bellowing thunder, no belching smoke and flame, no jerk and crash of rebound. Instead there came only a slow hissing, and a murky wisp of smoke spurted from the touch-hole and curled skyward. The stone ball rolled out of the muzzle and hopped lazily onto the ground to stop within a dozen yards, while from the bombard's muzzle came more of that same slow hissing and wreathing smoke as had come from the touch-hole.

As for Red Hubert's bombard, it did not take life at all; it remained like a dead thing, even though the giant archer damned it with oaths and thrust on the skewer so hard that the slender rod bent beneath his fingers. Only from the bombard of John the Wolf, furthest of the three, did there come any real semblance of explosion. And that was only half-hearted at best.

There was more of smoke from the muzzle than of flame, and the muffled explosion threw the ball only halfway to the charging foe, so slowly that it might have been hurled by a rain-soaked ballista rope. In fact, so short the ball fell, and so muffled was the explosion, that the Frenchmen gave it no heed; without halt or swerve they continued their headlong charge upon the English knights.

With a crash they drove into the melee with such force that horses and horsemen were hurled sideways like nine-pins, and friend and foe alike overborne by the charge.

"The powder—it has spoiled, it has become ruined by weather!" panted Robin, shaking his head in bewilderment and dismay. "Yet how can it be wetted, since there has been no rain?"

"The reason is of small matter, so long as we know that it is ruined," said Red Hubert. He had leaped from his cart and was already snatching the long, goose-feathered shafts from his quiver. His freckled face was smiling with contentment.

"Bombards and their devil's powder may be well enough in their way, but to an old archer there is naught so sweet as the pull of an honest yew-stave in the fingers, and the whistle of the shaft upon the wing! Eh, Old Wolf?"

"Now it is thy tongue that is wagging, when there is better work to be done," retorted the gaunt archer as he likewise notched an arrow to the string. "At this range a man needs not even test for windage!"

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Swiftly came the twang of his bowstring and the whistle of the barbed death. Red Hubert and Peter Joy were not whit slower. Struck between frontlet and body trapping, the mount of the nearest Frenchman screamed and went to its knees, plummeting its rider over its head. The second horse plunged and kicked, swerving out and wide of the melee.

But John the Wolf's arrow, not a hair's breath off its mark, struck home in the unprotected armpit of a French knight who had just raised his battle-ax to strike. With a convulsive jerk, the chevalier raised almost stiff-legged in his stirrups before toppling over and underneath the churning hoofs.

CHAPTER V

BEWARE GOOD ENGLISH YEW

EVEN so, the outnumbered English were being beaten down and borne under, when the archers of the bombard escort came up at the run and ranged themselves in line with the bombards.

Jerking arrows from their quivers, they thrust them, barb down, into the earth at their toes, so that before each bowman the feathered ends thrust up waist high. Thus it was not necessary for any man to lower bow or give so much as a downward glance as he plucked each new shaft to replace the one just loosed.

The rounded helms and full-forged mail of the French chevaliers were of stoutest steel, so that any but the best-aimed shafts would glance away, but there were bowmen among the New Forest men who could bring down flying eagles on the wing. An upraised arm or misplaced ailette gave sufficient target for an arrow.

As for the Frenchmen's chargers, they were vulnerable at every swirl or ripple of their trappings. Even before a new shout gave Robin notice of the arrival of Sir Allan Mayne at the head of other archers and a score of pikemen in half-mail, the Frenchmen were beginning to lose heart for the fray, to rein their chargers out of the melee as speedily as they might.

Seeing the first signs of retreat, John the Wolf suddenly cast down his bow with an oath.

"Stay thy hand, Hubert, thou great ox! Or shoot at the riders and not at the horses, if thou must! For there are already horses for each of us, and more. And I have my eye on one e'en now that I swear no hobilar shall have!"

So saying, he drew his archer's knife, and with no other protection than steel cap and archer's jerkin, he went leaping toward the stricken field. After one grunted oath, Red Hubert followed after, and Peter Joy came racing at Hubert's heels.

Sir Allan had set spurs to his horse and with a shout had hurled himself into the battle. But the French waited no longer. Those that were still ahorse rode off over the hill from which they had come.

There was no pursuit. Of the English no more than a scant half-dozen remained ahorse, and even those were battered and exhausted, as much from the stifling weight of their armor as from the blows they had taken and given.

Some were sore wounded; others lay in the crumpled sprawl of death. But Robin and Sir Allan were amazed and pleased to recognize the dusty and battered figure of Sir John Chandos stumbling amid the dead and wounded.

THEN, glancing toward the bombards, Robin perceived that the three archers had captured three war-horses with emptied saddles. Robin turned to meet them, his brow still furrowed and gloomy over the failure of the bombards. But John the Wolf was grinning with pleasure.

"Now we shall be as ready as any hobilar," he exclaimed. "Not only have we the means of riding into likely French villages, but the means as well for carrying away whatsoever we may find of worth therein. For I see Peter and Hubert here have been as lucky as I."

Hubert laughed. "All we had to do was to lay hand to the dragging reins of these beasts as they ran loose about the field. How got you that wicked looking steed

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you lead, Old Wolf? Methought you had had enough of such snorting beasts!"

The gaunt archer grinned. "In truth there was a battered Frenchman hanging to the reins and striving to mount, when I came upon him. But this Frenchman was so hammered in the melee that he overtoppled at the first push I gave him, though it was of no more force than to up-end a child. So I had naught to do but take up the reins and lead the beast here, e'en as you have seen."

"You had the rider to hand, and let him go free with no more than a push?" exclaimed Peter Joy. "Hast forgot that a Frenchman may bring a goodly ransom?"

"And no ordinary Frenchman, by this figured saddle and these trappings!" added Red Hubert.

"What of it? Butcher de Brenn or some other knight would have taken him from me had he been of worth, even as they took from us that French *comte* at Caen," answered John the Wolf imperturbably. "Let them catch their own prisoners, an they want them. Also there was another reason. See you nothing strange about this horse?"

Red Hubert took another look and uttered an exclamation of surprise. "It is that very devil-horse that threw and nigh dragged you to death at the river, Old Wolf! Had not that lusty prisoner villein freed you, you would not be been standing here now."

"Aye, the same horse," said Wolf John. "And this rider of his that I let go—he had that same villein's long arms and barn-door shoulders, for surely not even in France could there be two sets of shoulders of such width!" He squinted one eye, and spat. "Now we are quits—he of me, and I of him."

"Since the Frenchmen are all gone and the afternoon already grows late," said Robin, "yon village seems a pleasant place to bivouac for the night. There will be shelter and, mayhap, water and grain for our horses as well. So tie your animals behind the carts and we will drive on into the village."

WITHIN the hour they had the wagon teams unharnessed and fed, and a great fire roaring for their own evening meat, which Wat the Armorer set himself to cooking over the coals.

Red Hubert left to search among the deserted houses for any skulking enemy, and shortly thereafter Peter Joy and John the Wolf slipped away likewise, under pretense of fetching more wood and water, though oddly their footsteps died away toward the battlefield rather than toward the other houses.

Robin Santerre poked and prodded at the bombards, frowning worriedly, and he knelt to sniff at the muzzles and touch-holes. All at once he clambered into one of the wagons and, rolling out a powder cask, fetched it into the light of the fire and carefully broached it.

Dipping a handful of the powder from the top, he peered at it for a long moment before he dumped it in a little heap upon a flat board. Then he scraped forth a live coal from the cookfire and dropped it onto the heaped grains.

But instead of taking fire with quick flash and flame, the powder merely sizzled and charred, sending up thick smoke and rank odor as the fire crept slowly along.

"Nay, we already know that it is spoiled and weakened," said Wat the Armorer. "Mayhap water has somehow gotten into it, even as it did aboard the ship when we crossed the Channel."

"Not water—for see, it is dry!" exclaimed Robin. Without waiting for answer, he dug his other hand deep into the cask once more, even to the bottom. And clutching a handful of the very bottom grains, he likewise examined them critically before scattering them on the board.

"Weakened it is, but not spoiled. Not spoiled for good, Wat! Look how the powder at the top of the cask is all black, and this from the bottom of the cask is gray and yellow. Yet in the first compounding it was all of a mixture. Do you not see?"

The armorer shook his head. "All I see is that it is still weakened and worthless."

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"The coarse black on the top is the charcoal, Wat! Being lighter, it has lifted to the top in the jolting over the road, whereas the sulphur and the brimstone, being finer and heavier, have sifted to the bottom. I doubt not that the charges in the bombards separated from their compounding in like manner. Scant wonder is it that the powder sizzled and charred, instead of taking fire with speed and force."

The Armorer scratched his head. "Then what Sir John Chandos claimed is true—that bombards are better suited for engines of siege than for the field. For only by fresh compounding before each firing can we be sure that the grains will be well mixed, and in proper proportion."

But Robin shook his head, his eyes sparkling. "I remember that the wetted powder on board ship, when it dried, formed itself into little lumps in which the charcoal, sulphur, and brimstone were equally mixed. Here, give me a drop of water in my palm!"

Then into the wetted palm he dropped pinches of the powder both from the top and bottom of the cask. After mixing it well, he spread it out in little lumps on the board to dry.

Warmed by the heat of the cooking fire, the lumps took but a little while to dry. And this time, when Robin touched them with the glowing coal, each little lump vanished in a flash of flame and *whoosh* of spurting smoke.

"We have but to mix it wet and then dry it again in such little lumps, said Robin. "And I have another thought, too. If we measure it out beforehand, just enough for each bombard charge, and then sew each charge up tightly in a little sack, we will not have to measure each ladle into the bombard afterward every time we charge it. With a score of these charges already sacked, we can load and fire five times faster than we did before!"

"And good news, that, for honest men, but small comfort to the knights and barons," said Wat the Armorer. "For it hastens the day when common men with such bombards may overthrow all the armored knights that ride. I will bid Hubert look for linen or other cloth in these houses when he searches."

BUT already the giant archer was returning, and on his face was a puzzled expression. "Come with me," he said to Robin and Wat, "for behind this furthest house is somewhat that is great puzzle to me."

Going with him, they rounded the last house corner and then halted in amazement.

There, with two horses still hitched to it by harness, stood a curious thing on wheels. It had a long trough-like body, with two great poles protruding from either side, and a maze of ropes extending from poles to trough.

Robin let out a long breath. "A catapult! And not a fixed catapult for placement, but mounted on wheels for quick moving! Mayhap this is the very catapult that spitted those Wessex knights with its shafts, and then vanished as if on wings!"

"And look to the bowstring, and this cunning mesh of ropes and tackle-blocks," cut in the armorer admiringly. "Instead of an unwieldy windlass to be slow-cranked by men, the artillerymen have but to hook on yon horses to this tackle, and so draw taut the bowstring to its trigger in one tenth the time."

"The leader of these Frenchmen must be not only a keen soldier, but an ingenious man as well," agreed Robin.

He gazed again critically at the machine. "Even thus I had it in mind to mount the bombards. With a light frame and such strong wheels as these mounted directly under our bombard sledges, we would do away with the whole weight of the heavy carts. And with two horses harnessed to each bombard frame, we could maneuver as quickly as they moved this catapult. Think you that you could build such frames, Wat?"

The armorer nodded. "With the wheels from the carts, and the timbers from these houses, it would not be an over-hard task. Lucky we reached here before the hobilars,

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before they burned the village to the last roof-tree. I will set about it at cock-crow in the morning."

Returning to the fire, they found Sir Allan Mayne and Sir John Chandos there. Smelling the sputtering meat, the knights had been glad to stop and break their fasts. Despite the battering he had received in the melee, Sir John was in high spirits over the victory.

THEN out of the gathering dusk stumbled Peter Joy and John the Wolf. The gaunt archer's grumbling traveled even ahead of his feet.

"We had thought to search the battlefield for any good sword or armor or other little thing of worth. But Butcher de Brenn with Will o' the Fens and his accursed hobilars were there before us. Even now they are quartering the field like greedy wolves. So that all we found was this." He threw something heavy and clattering to the ground.

"A shield and an over-battered one at that." Wat, the Armorer pushed it carelessly with his foot. "How did it chance that the hobilars did not get it before you?"

"Because it was in a little hollow off to one side, for one thing," said John the Wolf. "And for another thing they knew not it was there—which I did, seeing that it belonged to that same Frenchman from whom I took the horse."

"A shield all sable, and without blazon or quartering." Sir John Chandos stared at it. "That is strange." He took it up, studied it, and then with a quick cry drew his poniard and slashed its point across the shield. Whereupon the mystery was clear, for the black cloth that had been fastened across the shield's face came away in strips, revealing the bright lines of the quarterings and charges underneath.

At sight of them Sir John Chandos gave an even louder cry, and whirled on John the Wolf.

"Where found you this shield, archer? Quick with thy answer!"

"Where found I it? Why where its owner, the Frenchman, dropped it when I took his horse, e'en as I told you but a moment agone," answered the archer testily. "If you doubt me, you have but to regard the horse which is still tied to that cart over there. For the daubings on its saddle are the same as on this shield."

But Sir John was no longer heeding. "Du Guesclin!" he cried, turning to Sir Allan Mayne. "It was Bertrand du Guesclin himself with whom I tilted—and I knew it not!"

"Du Guesclin!" Sir Allan gaped with amazement. "Then we had him—"

Sir John Chandos' face fell. "Aye, he would have made a prize worth even the King's attention. For no Frenchman, unless it be King Philip himself, would have been so important or brought a greater ransom. If it be du Guesclin who faces us, we must haste with the news to the King and the Lord Constables at once!"

As they climbed to their saddles and clattered away, the bombardiers around the fire stared at each other wordlessly. The silence was broken by a great groan and a stream of curses from John the Wolf. Snatching off his steel cap, he beat himself with both fists over the bare head.

"In my hands—in my very hands, and I let him go! Ten thousand livres, mayhap twenty thousand! May I gut myself with my own arrow before I exchange quits with any other Frenchman!"

CHAPTER VI

THE RIVER OF JEOPARDY

BUT now word came of a threat even greater than a du Guesclin raiding the flank. For spurring messengers from the south brought news of a great French army there, full fifty thousand strong, marching up out of Aquitaine to fall upon the English.

Other messengers brought equally discomforting word that ahead, near Paris, King Philip was frantically collecting another great host including the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Lorraine, the Counts of Saarbrucken, Blamont, and Salm, and countless others with all their knights and levies.

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Hearing which, Red Hubert gave a grunt. "Now mayhap there will be more war and less pillage, and the Butcher's hobilars will gather more blows than plunder. Certain it is that, an we stay here, we will be caught between these two huge armies like a nut between the pincers. Our King would do well to make haste back to the coast."

At Liseux, after sacking that pleasant city, King Edward did indeed change his line of march. But not back toward the Channel. Instead he headed almost due north, to the puzzlement of many.

It was Sir Allan Mayne who brought the explanation.

"We head toward the far north, toward Flanders, where our allies, the Flemishers, wait to join us in great force. With their help we may well withstand all that the French can bring against us."

"To Flanders, across all of France?" cried Robin. "But what of the two great rivers that lie between—the Seine and the Somme? For, if we fail to force the crossing of either, we are worse than rats in a trap!"

"Nonetheless to Flanders we go," answered Sir Allan grimly. "For me, after naught but burning and pillage, it would seem pleasant to find Frenchmen barring the way with knightly blows!"

"So said our old fire-eater, Sir John Chandos," said the red-headed archer. "And his head is still ringing, I wot, from those same knightly blows that he was so eager to exchange."

Toward the Seine, indeed, the army now marched. But arrived there, they found every bridge destroyed to its foundation, and the river itself too wide and deep to be forded. Scouting parties sent out to the left, toward the sea, brought back the same tale from there. There was naught to do but turn upstream where the river might narrow enough to be fordable. But upstream also meant directly toward Paris.

But still the news was all evil. At Elboeuf, the bridge was down, and the same at Mantes, and at Poissy. Even Sir Allan's face was gloomy, for Poissy was but one day's march short of Paris. And every messenger brought more alarming news about the vast army that was almost completey assembled there by now.

Although he sent his hobilars to burn St. Germain and St. Cloud, on the very outskirts of the French capital, Edward kept the main army all day in camp.

"Back we cannot go," said Sir Allan. "Cross this river we cannot, for the bridge is burned. And to overthrow King Philip with his outnumbering French behind their own fortifications is beyond all hope."

"Then what remains that we can do?" growled John the Wolf.

"Why, naught remains but to make such a last fight as will be told about through all Christendom."

Red Hubert scowled. "A murrain upon it! I would liefer find a crossing and live to tell it myself, than be a dead hero told about even throughout Christendom!"

"Nay, there is no choice," said the knight, "for there is no crossing to be found."

Overhearing, Robin who had just come up from the river's side, caught his arm. "Come with me," he begged excitedly, "and see if you glimpse what methinks I do."

AT THE water's edge Sir Allan looked for a long time, and then shook his head. "I see nothing more than I have seen before."

"Not above the water, but beneath it," said Robin. "Stoop, and look close!"

And after that second glance, the knight started. "Piers—the stone foundations of a bridge!"

"Aye, and being stone they did not burn when the bridge burned," said Robin. "Could not our *gynours*, with timbers and felled logs, make shift to rebuild the bridge at least enough for our crossing?"

But already the knight was turning away with huge strides. "If they can, we may well escape this trap even now. Certain it is that word of your finding must be taken to the King at once."

And before noon the whole force of engineers was at work with hammer and maul and axe and saw, while archers and

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even knights and squires dropped bow and sword to lend a hand at dragging the great timbers. Only the hobilars were absent; the King had sent them out with orders to redouble their burning, that the smoke of the fired houses might make a curtain from prying French eyes.

A good curtain they made, for in the mid-afternoon two heralds came, with fanfare of trumpets, and with them a cardinal in full vestments. Met at the outskirts of the camp and so guided that they caught no sight of the river and the toiling *gynours,* they were led to the King's tent, and, shortly after that they went away again. A passing squire dropped the news in the bombardiers' ears.

"The cardinal was from the French King himself. King Philip, saying that we are caught in a trap without any escape, called upon our King to surrender, for the saving of needless bloodshed."

"And what said our King to that?" demanded Robin.

"He sent word back that we would never surrender without a battle, but that to save needless bloodshed he himself would gladly meet the King of France in single combat, the victor to gain both the crowns of England and France."

"Single combat, and to the *outrance?"* Red Hubert blinked. "Mayhap there is more courage underneath this clanking armor than I had given due."

"And mayhap," said Wat the Armorer dryly, "our King knows that he is much larger, stouter man than the King of France. Why did he not challenge the champion of all the French knights—this Bertrand du Guesclin, for instance?"

By now the *gynours* had assembled such a mass of timbers as seemed sufficient to make a footing for the whole bridge. And as soon as the evening shadows fell they were at work like beavers, standing to their waists and even necks in water as they laid and secured the great beams and planking.

So that by midnight the last plank was laid, and the van of the army already crossing. With a rumble and creaking, the bombards took the planks, the supply carts and then the great ballistae and other engines of siege following.

With the last cart and last man across, men were sent skipping back with torches to set to the new-laid timbers. As morning broke and the van of the French army, called by the smoke and flames, came up, nothing of the bridge remained but a seething line of fire.

At that the French sent up a great yell of rage and disappointment, lining the farther bank and shaking their fists.

Red Hubert grinned mirthlessly and shook his own fist in answer.

"Aye, curse!" he yelled. "Curse even louder, an it do you any good. For the same river that stopped us has now stopped you, and we are well away and safe."

But Wat the Armorer shook his head.

"Safe for twenty-four hours mayhap. But there are other bridges and fords in plenty up-river, beyond Paris, I doubt me not. And these Frenchmen will be up and crossed and hot after us ere we have gone a two-days' march."

THAT the armorer had spoken truth was soon made evident, for on the second day scouting horsemen brought word that the French had crossed the river and were already in hot pursuit.

And now instead of a raid, the march of the English became a flight. A flight toward the northern coast.

"And the Devil take the hindmost," grunted Red Hubert. "Or if not the Devil, at least this testy, hard-riding du Guesclin. And of the two, I am not sure I would not choose me the Devil."

Robin glanced with satisfaction at the bombards, now riding high and easily on the simple frames and tall wheels that the Armorer had built. "An the Frenchmen come up fast, our ballistae and heavy wagons in the siege train will be hard put to stay ahead. Lucky it is that we conceived these new bombard mounts."

But at that moment Sir Allan rode up with a troubled frown. "The King has ordered all the archers, including our New

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Forest Men, into the van. Bombards and bombardiers are to fall into the rear and march with the train."

"In the train?" John the Wolf snarled. "A knightly reward indeed for discovering the bridge piers and so providing a crossing! For with the French army raging up behind, the rear is the most perilous post of the march."

"And hence a far likelier place for the seizing of that Frenchman whom you are so eager to catch," said Red Hubert, grinning. "You may yet have chance to meet again with that du Guesclin who is worth twenty thousand livres." He turned to Sir Allan. "But if you and the forest men march in the van, who then will guard us and the train?"

"Five hundred picked men-at-arms," replied the knight. "Also de Brenn and his hobilars, since though mounted they are light-armed and hence quicker to ride against threatened raids."

"The Butcher de Brenn?" John the Wolf spat out an oath. "Now indeed my neck already begins to ache with the feel of the Frenchmen's gibbets. For the Butcher and Will o' the Fens would quicker desert us than guard us."

"That may be," said Red Hubert, "but Will o' the Fens' neck will ache quicker than thine if du Guesclin catches him. So hold thy growl, Old Wolf, until there be somewhat to growl about."

Past Pontoise, Grisy, and Auneil the army raced, not even lingering to fire those luckless towns. Instead of five or six miles per day, the army was now averaging twenty. Full twenty of the heaviest carts that could not keep up with the pace were left behind.

Baron de Brenn rode past the next day with a black scowl on his face, the reason for which presently came to the bombardiers' ears. Full twenty hobilars who had sacked and burned the abbey of Beauvais had been summarily gibbeted by King Edward's orders.

"Ho!" grunted John the Wolf, "we gibbet our own hobilars for sacking and burning, do we? 'Tis strange how hot pursuing Frenchmen make good Christians of us all at once!"

"Nay, that is not the reason for the gibbeting." Wat the Armorer shook his head. "More likely it was that in the pillage these hobilars delayed the march."

THE Frenchmen were already hacking at the rear-guard when the English reached the Somme at Pont-Remi. Knowing there was a bridge there, King Edward had already sent ahead a strong force of men-at-arms and archers to try to force the passage.

But the alarm had outsped the hurrying English, and they found such a strong force of Frenchmen from the nearby towns gathered on the opposite bank that the advance force was beaten back with over five hundred Englishmen killed or captured.

The bridge-heads and fords at Long-Pré and Picquigny proved likewise impregnable to assault. Like a wounded lion gnawing at his paws, King Edward turned left and along the Somme bank, looking vainly for a passage.

Looking at the ever-widening river, Wat the Armorer shook his head. "Now we are in even worse trap than we were at Paris. For here the river is more than twice as wide, and every bridge or ford is guarded on the opposite side by increasing bands of Frenchmen. Yet we cannot turn upstream where the river might be narrower, for that would but bring us full against the whole French army."

Only one comfort had the change in conditions brought to Robin. Now that the bombards traveled with the train, they were in among the siege wagons and the supply carts. And among the supply carts traveled the Flemish merchant, Jacob Algelt, and his black-eyed, red-lipped daughter, Katharine.

Strange as it was to find a pretty girl of sixteen marching with an invading army, her presence was no stranger than was the position of her father. For the bombards which Robin served were not the King's, nor were they any part of the national artillery.

They were the private property of the

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old Flemish merchant, from the bombard tubes down to the last ball and ounce of powder. At his own cost the merchant had had the bombards cast, the balls cut and the powder manufactured. Then as a private venture of profit rather than patriotism he had brought the weapons to England, hoping to sell them to King Edward for his war on France.

Yet so distrustful of these strange weapons were the King and leaders of the army that only because of the good word of the Black Prince had they consented to use them, and then only by lease until they had well proved their merits.

As for the girl, she was an only child, and whether her father had brought her with him because of this or because she would not remain behind, was more than Robin could say. Yet her knowledge of the weapons and the compounding of the powder, as even Wat the Armorer admitted, was greater than their own, and perhaps equal to her father's.

It was more than this, however, that set Robin's heart to pounding at every glimpse of her. From the first meeting, he had found the girl's sparkling eyes and red, laughing lips, more deadly even than the bombards themselves.

HENCE when he found himself marching alongside the light, canvas-covered wagon in which the Flemishers rode and lived, he was taken again with that fierce pounding of the heart. Then the tarpaulin edges lifted, and the impish face of the girl looked out at him.

"You are well come," she cried in her odd Flanders accent, "for I had feared lest you perhaps had fallen behind and been taken."

At her seeming solicitude Robin felt the hot blood flushing his face, and so fell a-stammering. "Nay—nay, sweet lady. With Wat's tall wheels we have kept ahead of the French. And, praise God, I am here and safe."

Whereupon she laughed. "It was not *you* I worried about, Sir Captain—it was only the bombards!"

The tarpaulin fell between them once more, but behind it he could still hear her laughter, which in no way improved his feelings inasmuch as he knew Wat and Red Hubert had heard the talk.

"An a maid laughed at me like that," said the red-headed archer, "I would buss her until she had no breath left for laughing, or else I would use a stout bowstave to the same effect."

Even the armorer smiled. " 'Tis pity that in those books of his which you studied at Oxford, Roger the Monk discoursed only of levers and powder, and mentioned naught of the even greater force that sometimes lies in a woman's eyes."

Since Robin could make no answer to that, he gave himself entirely to the progress of the bombards, calling so many orders and finding so much fault that the bombardiers changed their laughter to grumbling.

But when they halted at sunset to bivouac for the night, there were other and more important things to think on. For by now the river had widened until it was more than half a mile across, and so near to the sea had they come that they could see the black brine of the tide swirling on top of the water.

Wat the Armorer shook his head. "Now in truth I wot that we have come to the end. We are cornered between this great river and the sea itself, with the whole French army closing the way behind."

"Perhaps," said Robin," the King has word of some hidden ford here, for surely he would not lead into such a trap with open eyes." Yet, glancing at the vast width of the river, he could not speak in aught but gloomy tones.

CROSSING to the canvas-covered wagon, he called to the Flemisher inside. After a moment the merchant appeared, his skullcap perched above his grizzled locks and his black robe clutched tightly about his paunchy stomach.

"An the French attack us here," Robin said, "whip up your horses at once! Put as many wagons as possible between your-

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selves and the battle. And keep crouched well below the wagon sides, both thee and thy daughter, for shelter against arrows and crossbow quarrels."

The merchant's face whitened and his lips went thin. He moistened them nervously with little lickings of the tongue. "And what of you and the bombards?"

"I have plan to draw them up and facing outward," said Robin, "to wreak such destruction with them as we can. And, for that reason, I plan to double-charge them with two balls instead of one."

"Two balls? Double-charge?" Despite his fright the fat merchant let out a little cry of covetous dismay. "But the double-charge may burst them! They may be ruined. For they have never been proved against such great charge and weight of ball."

"Better that than being over-ridden and cut down," said Robin grimly, and he turned back to the bombards.

But, after swinging the guns around until they pointed outward, he had another thought.

"Not with two balls," he exclaimed to Hubert and Wat. "Double measure of powder, yes. But I mind me now how great was the injury to those crossbowmen at Caen when we did fire upon them that bag of gold coins which John the Wolf hid there after stealing it from the French count's herald. So charge each bombard with one ball, and on top of that ram home such arrowheads as you have in your pouches and to spare."

While they were doing this, there was a trampling of hooves, and Baron de Brenn rode by with two horsemen. One of the riders was Will o' the Fens, at sight of whom John the Wolf spat out a sour oath.

The other rider, though a Frenchman by his dress, rode not as a prisoner but with free rein. And his dark face wore, instead of alarm, a look of covetousness and greed. With spurred horses, the three rode hurriedly toward the King's tent.

No sooner were the bombards reloaded, then, than John the Wolf, with his habitual curiosity, was off to find what it was all about. He returned with his eyes glinting.

"It was as Robin said. Our King heard rumor that there was a ford somewhere near. So he spread word that he would give an hundred gold nobles to any man who would reveal the place. Will o' the Fens found this Frenchman, Gobin Agache, who claims to know the whereabouts of such a ford. So he and the Butcher are hurrying the traitor to the King."

"Ho, ho!" jeered Red Hubert. "And the French traitor expects to live to spend this gold, with Will o' the Fens having knowledge of it? If so, he is fool as well as well as traitor! But there is a ford here, then?"

"Aye. It seems that the river hath a bar of chalky ledge running completely across. By reason of its white bottom the ford is known as *Blanche Taque*—the White Stones."

"It doth sound incredible," said the Armorer, gazing dubiously at the wide stretch of swirling water. "But if there be a ford, why do we not begin the crossing at once?"

"Because the King does not choose to venture the crossing in the dark, and also because the crossing is possible only at low tide. That will not be until tomorrow's dawn. But at that time, so this traitorous Frenchman holds, the tide will be so low that men afoot as well as on horseback may cross."

CHAPTER VII

TRUMPET TO BATTLE

ALL night long the army bivouacked, yet no man slept, feeling full well that the morrow might bring their last day on earth. And when at dawn they looked across the Somme, hope dropped low. For on the other side could be seen the glinting arms of thousands of Frenchmen, cavaliers as well as levies afoot.

Then the trumpets blared before the King's tent and mounted messengers spurred throughout the whole camp, ranging the army according to the King's orders. Five thousand archers with the pick

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of the knights and men-at-arms were to lead the way and try to overthrow the French defenders on the farther side. The rest of the army was to follow in order, with the hobilars bringing up the rear with the train.

"The Butcher's own idea, I wot!" grunted the Armorer. "Then if this du Guesclin falls upon us before we are all crossed, the Butcher will throw us and our bombards and the train wagons to him to save his own skin. For plunder is e'er a retarding device."

"Yet mayhap we are not so unlucky after all," said Robin. "Mayhap this French traitor leads the army into a trap so that, over their heads in water, they can be quickly cut to bits."

"Which would still leave us behind in another trap." John the Wolf pointed with his hand. "But this French traitor will not out-live the trap, if trap it be. The King has left him with the hobilars to be the last man across. And at first sign of treachery they have order to pull his head from his shoulders!"

There indeed, among the hobilars, sat the French traitor between Butcher de Brenn and Will o' the Fens. But his reins were no longer free, for they were tight clutched by a grim man-at-arms. And another man-at-arms on the farther side kept tight hold on a hempen rope that was noosed around Gobin Agache's neck.

Now the cry of "Archers to the front!" was running down the line. Sir Allan Mayne waved as he rode past at the head of his Masterless Men from the New Forest, each man holding high his great bow that it not be wet and ruined by the water during the crossing.

Knee-deep and then waist-deep they waded into the river, the Irish and Welsh stabbers surging at their heels. And then with clank of metal and snort of chargers, the knights and men-at-arms followed.

"We will be lucky, an the water come not over our bombards and powder, and so wet them to their ruin," said Robin, as with troubled eyes he watched the deepening of the river around the archers' waists. "Peter Joy, do you see that the powder in the powder carts is piled on top of the balls and other stores to be as high out of water as possible.

"And do you all, when we start to cross with our bombards, hold high your braziers and firing skewers, that they be not quenched in the crossing."

All this time the advance archers and horsemen were wading almost waist-deep. Then as they passed mid-stream, even as Gobin Agache had said, the water began to shallow. Whereupon the forest men let out a great shout and hurried forward, notching arrows to their bowstrings.

SO GREAT was the eagerness of the Frenchmen on the farther side, however, that they could wait no longer. Instead of holding back to charge the English as they slipped and scrambled up the river bank, the French knights spurred recklessly into the water to meet them.

Which was a grievous mistake, for the archers shot not at them but at their mounts. The animals, stung if not deadly-stricken by the barbs, plunged and pitched with such force that many unseated their riders. Pulled down by their heavy armor, these latter sank like so much lead; many a good knight drowned in that moment without either having received or struck an actual blow.

Having loosed a half-dozen shafts each, the archers now spread apart to let the men-at-arms behind them ride through. These, with ready ax and sword, fell upon the already shaken French chevaliers and cut them down or drove them ahead in full rout.

Meantime the archers had started shooting anew, but now they aimed their shafts at the French crossbowmen and foot levies who still stood in battle array on the bank. Riddled by a rain of shafts, these levies fell in windrows, or else threw away bows and pikes as they fled in wild panic.

All this the bombardiers had watched with keen excitement from the other bank, John the Wolf even standing up on top of his high bombard seat. "The crossing

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is won!" he cried. "The Frenchmen break and run, our men after them! I can see Tyrrel—Sir Allan—"

"Turn thy eyes the other way, and see if you can catch glimpse of du Guesclin behind us which is more to the point," growled Wat the Armorer. "The army is almost across safely, but we are still on this side with du Guesclin and the whole French army. Ha! said I not so?"

Even as he spoke, from the rising land to the south came the loud thunder of galloping hooves, and then a great shout. Immediately after there broke over the slope a flashing wave of men and horses, the gleam of swords and lance-tips making a white crest to the wave. With yells of rage at sight of their quarry escaping almost under their noses, the French horsemen drove down on the hobilars and the train. Out in front on a great red charger rode a knight in sable mail.

With one glance at that charging horde, Robin spun about with terror in his face, But it was terror for someone else, and not for himself.

Then hope sprang anew as he sighted close to him the canvas-covered wagon. Standing up in it, frantically lashing the reluctant horses into the river, was the old merchant, Jacob Algelt. And clinging to the seat beside him, her hair flowing behind her but her eyes sparkling with excitement, rode Katherine.

"Into the water and whip them on across!" shouted Robin encouragingly. "We will remain with the hobilars and hold them off as long as we may!"

"Which will not be long, if we wait for the hobilars!" said Wat.

"Nay, the hobilars will not wait for us, so I will not wait for them!" John the Wolf cursed, and laid his cracking lash to the team drawing his bombard. With a jerk and a jolt the animals surged forward, dragging the bombard carriage at a run down the bank and into the water.

So unexpected was the jerk that the gaunt archer was hurled from his perch. Clawing at empty air, he spun head over heels, to land with a thud in the dirt. Limping and cursing, he rose to his feet and stared wildly about him.

"THIS way, John! This way!" shouted Robin, with his heart in his throat. For the rushing wave of horsemen had burst over and through the outlying wagons like a giant comber, and everywhere mailed men thrust and slashed at the fleeing wagoners. Full upon John the Wolf were driving a score of Frenchmen, at their head the sable-armed knight on the great red horse.

"Curse this bow!" Red Hubert was gasping, and out of the corner of his eye Robin could see the red-headed archer clawing for quiver and bow which he had slung over his back to have freer hand with his reins.

Now the giant Frenchman was standing in his stirrups, his gleaming battle-ax already uplifted for the blow. Yet John the Wolf stood frozen in his tracks, the dazed look still on his face as he turned it, bare and unprotected, up toward the Frenchman.

But the blow never fell. Almost at the last moment, the Frenchman suddenly dropped his hand, swerved the great roan with knee and wrenching hand on the reins, and hurtled on past toward de Brenn and his hobilars.

The shock of his passing seemed to bring John the Wolf out of his daze, for he suddenly let out a yelp and dodged like a hare beset by hounds.

Twisting and ducking, he threaded between the chevaliers, so that only the outermost one got a fair stroke at him. The stroke did not land, for just as it was being delivered a belated arrow from Red Hubert cut the horse out from between the Frenchman's knees.

"This way, John—this way!" shouted Robin again. Turning, the gaunt archer raced that way, ending in a bound that landed him breathless and clawing atop the bombard muzzle.

Simultaneously Robin felt his own arm gripped, heard the armorer's voice in his ear. "Hold fast, Robin! There is naught

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more we can do here now and we have our own skins to save!"

With the words came the crack of the whip as Wat laid the lash to the horses. Bouncing and jolting, the bombard rattled down the slope and into the water. Almost wheel to wheel raced Red Hubert's bombard as the red-headed archer plied the whip.

They were axle deep in the river before Robin caught his breath and had time to glance around. Then he realized the truth of what the armorer had said.

Besides the bombards and their companion carts with the powder and ball which Peter Joy was urging on ahead, only half a dozen other wagons out of the whole train had escaped. But Robin's heart leaped as he recognized one of these, just a half-length ahead and to the right; it was the canvas-covered wagon, with the old merchant lashing the horses, and Katherine Algelt clinging at his side.

Then, grunting and panting, John the Wolf came clambering along the rocking bombard to the seat where Robin and Wat sat. To Robin's amazement he still had his bow clutched tight in one hand. He grinned sourly as he looked at it.

"I knew not that I still held it until just now, and then it was too late to throw it away."

"You may find good use for it yet," said Wat the Armorer. "For did I not say the Butcher and these hobilars would not stay to risk their skins for ours? Look!"

ROBIN saw de Brenn and over half of his hobilars spurring and urging their horses along in the water. Nor was that all. Back at the bank the Frenchmen had begun to spur into the water and splash after them.

John the Wolf cursed, but it was at the hobilars and not at the French. "Now by my bow, if I were not still shaking from the nearness of that black Frenchman's ax, I would send a whole quiver of shafts among these cowards a-horseback!" he cried. "They pause not even to make a rear-guard fight."

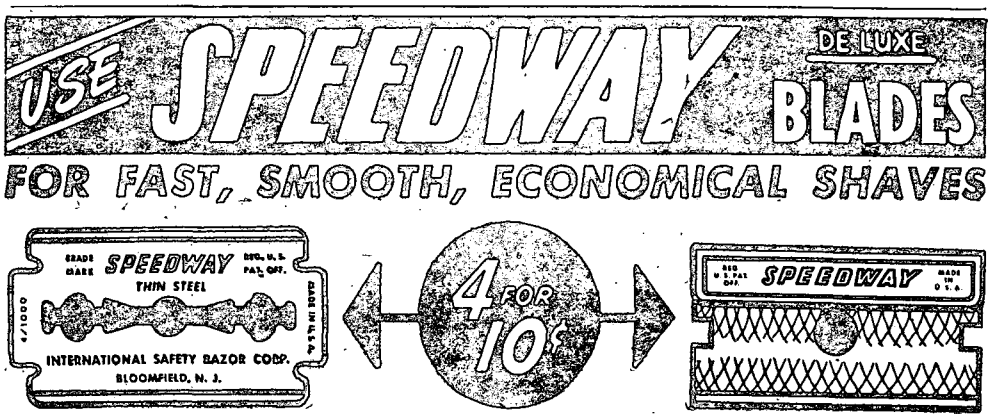
But heedless of the curses, the hobilars and de Brenn spurred on past and continued to press their mounts toward the farther side.

Wat the Armorer grunted. "Mayhap there is some justice to it, after all. For you glimpsed, did you not, that Will o' the Fens and the traitorous Frenchmen were not among these that got away?"

Robin Santerre, however, was not concerned with hobilars nearly so much as with the pursuing Frenchmen who were already splashing stirrup-deep in pursuit.

"Hand the brazier and firing skewer to Wolf John here," he ordered the Armorer, "and do you splash over and give hand to Hubert with his bombard. If those Frenchmen gain much closer on us, we will e'en see if these bombards will fire in water as well as on land."

With John the Wolf fanning the brazier, and with the Armorer atop the other bom-



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bard seat alongside Red Hubert, Robin caught a moment's breath. But then to his right and almost abreast of him he saw the Flemisher's canvas-covered cart.

Whether his horses had been frightened by the water, or whether they had been confused by the wild screams of the driver, Robin could not tell. But they were losing ground, and bade fair to stop stubbornly where they stood in mid-stream.

The old merchant, his robe flying in the wind, was plying the whip with desperate curses, and casting terrified glances back at the oncoming Frenchmen behind. But the girl Katherine smiled and even loosed one hand to send a wave to Robin.

"Praise be to God, you are still here and safe!" she cried. "And this time I mean thee and not the bombards—"

Then Robin saw her look suddenly upstream, and her whole face seemed to freeze in horror. "The boats!" she screamed. "Look upstream, Robin! The boats!"

Robin spun around, at first not able to take in the sense of her words, understanding only the sound of alarm that rang in her tone. She pointed wildly and his eyes swiftly followed her fear-laden gesture.

There, swinging swiftly down from around a point which had hitherto concealed them, came three large boats filled with armed men. Rowing and poling, they drove straight for the ford and the bombards, their bows and gunwales lined with glinting bills and pikes, and the darker metal of chainmail and steel caps. The shouted threats and curses all but drowned out the oar-beats.

The sunlight slanted through the trees in golden spears of light, and struck up harsh, pricking glints as it hit the Frenchmen's glittering armor. Near at hand, Robin could make out Wat's harsh mutter, and Katherine still stood frozen a graven image of terror and hopelessness.

"Now indeed is this a devil's malady for which there is no physic," said John the Wolf, his face taut. "For they can row faster than we can drive. And from the boats they can chop us to bits with those bills without ever coming in reach of our swords."

Robin's lips were thin and tight, and his eyes agleam. "They have not reached us yet. Hold tight, now, John, for there is no way to bring the bombard to bear except to turn the horses themselves."

CHAPTER VIII

FOR A DEVIL'S MALADY . . .

LASHING the off horse at the same time that he threw his whole weight on the reins, Robin endeavored to jerk the animals' heads around to face downstream. He set up a shout to Hubert and Wat on the other bombard: "Do you train your muzzle on those Frenchmen from the shore, and fire so soon as it bears! These boats we will try to care for of our own selves!"

But the bombard horses would pay heed to neither reins nor lash. Setting themselves into their harness, they drove straight ahead toward the farther shore.

At that Robin's heart sank, and the Frenchmen in the boats set up a yell of triumph and redoubled their efforts at the oars.

The next instant Robin saw Katherine Algelt standing up on the seat of the Flemish cart. She poised there, then she flung herself out and down. Her outstretched arms caught the neck of the nearest bombard horse, and clung. A moment later she had pulled herself up and over, and was standing on the insecure footing of the bombard pole, while she jerked and tugged at the head-harness of the snorting horses. Her efforts, aided by Robin's pull on the reins, made the horses give way, and they turned downstream turning the bombard after them. Quickly Robin dropped the reins and grabbed the hot firing skewer out of the brazier which John Wolf had continued to blow upon. Holding the point just above the bombard touch-hole, Robin glanced along the muzzle.

Not three score yards away, the leading boat was swirling down, the others clustered close behind. Robin could see the fierce scowls of the Frenchmen, could see the

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hands already tensing on the halberds. Then with a lurch the bombard muzzle swung to bear straight upon the boat. And Robin thrust the skewer deep and true.

The next instant he seemed fairly hurled into the air. He came down, knees and elbows crashing against metal and wood; his brain reeled and his nostrils filled and choked with the smoke and stinging fumes. When the smoke cleared he found himself clinging half to the bombard seat and half to the bombard, while John the Wolf lay in similar plight alongside, his forgotten bow still clutched in one hand.

The Frenchmen had been struck by a tornado of steel and death. The stone bombard ball, true-aimed and at pointblank range, had ripped through the leading boat's bow, crushing it like an egg shell under an axe. What Frenchmen had not been killed by the ball or the flying arrowheads, were already splashing in the water which ran red with blood.

Nor was the first boat the only one smitten. For the steel arrow-barbs that had been rammed atop the ball had scattered and whirled on all sides. They had spread disaster among the tight-packed Frenchmen in all the boats, especially the pole-men who, standing erect for better leverage, had thus offered greater target.

FOR as much time as it took Robin to scramble back to a firm seat, the stricken boats lay and drifted. Then while the screams and groans of the wounded filled the air, those Frenchmen still alive were seized with sudden panic. Dropping their weapons, they seized upon oars and poles and splashed away as furiously as they had come.

But even in that moment of triumph and with Wolf John's shout ringing in his ears, Robin felt a sickness of heart that was worse than any pain. For the horses were lifting their heads again and snorting, and the bombard pole on which Katherine Algelt had stood was empty now. The girl was not anywhere in sight.

Then there came a splash, and a panting laugh close beside him. And out of the water, which dragged her hair back in sodden streamers, rose Katherine Algelt; she caught at the bombard wheel and pulled herself erect.

"Now in truth both thee and thy bombards are passing rude;" she gasped. "For they make no difference between bombard ball or lady. I am quite sure that I was hurled as far by the lurch as was the stone ball by the discharge!"

His heart singing with joy, Robin caught her hand and pulled her up to the seat beside him. And if in his delight he held her very close, she seemed not to mind. For ten heartbeats he held her thus.

It was John the Wolf's sour voice that brought him back to the present. The gaunt archer was shouting a jeer across at Red Hubert and Wat the Armorer.

"Are ye so shaking, then, that ye cannot fit skewer into touch-hole? For I heard no bombard's voice but our own!"

"Since the mere sight of us pointing their way set the Frenchmen running for the shore," answered Red Hubert, "why waste the ball?"

"Nay," said the armorer. "The real reason was that there was a deep hole in this accursed ford. And into it our wheels dipped so deeply that this bombard gulped a whole bellyful of water. So that our powder is as wet as the bottom of the ford itself, and no whit easier to set afire!"

Looking toward the shore, Robin saw that the Frenchmen, either frightened by the fate of the boats or by the bombard turned upon them, had turned and were splashing back frantically.

Then he perceived something else. Ashore where two tall trees with outstretching limbs grew close to the water, a knot of French horsemen and footmen had gathered. Foremost of the horsemen was that sable-armed giant on the red horse; he was shouting directions to men who were climbing squirrel-like into the trees.

"It is a long bowshot, though I have seen you shoot further, Old Wolf," called Red Hubert. "Were that Frenchman bare of head, instead of full-helmed, you might repay the reckoning for that ax that nigh

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split you in twain a while back. For unless I mistake that black-armed Frenchman is the same who raised his ax above you while you stood chittering like a frighted rabbit."

But John the Wolf shook his head. "Chittering mayhap I was, but not from fright. Rather it was with astonishment at seeing before me that same knight whose horse I stole when I pushed him away after he had out-hammered Sir John Chandos. And he was more; he was that same villein who loosed me from the devil-horse's stirrup!"

"Du Guesclin!" Robin gave an exclamation. "Then it is in truth du Guesclin? But what is it that he is doing now?"

The answer came even as he spoke. Suddenly the French knight waved his hand, and there was a scurry of movement, and then two black and kicking shapes shot from the ground to the tree-limbs where they hung and spun, still kicking.

"Will o' the Fens and that traitor Frenchmen, Gobin Agache, I wot." The armorer crossed himself. "Though one be traitor and the other murderer of women, it is a hard end to come to. This du Guesclin is a hard man."

"Aye—he pays his debts." John the Wolf suddenly turned and caught reins and whip from Robin's hand, and lashed the bombard horses into frantic motion. "It has just come to my mind that he has paid *all* his debts, and so is now free to start afresh. Sir John Chandos may have him an he wish, but I want no more of him in any fashion!"

As the horses drew the bombards through the shallower water toward where the main English army waited, Robin touched the girl's hand. "When the tide comes low again on the morrow, I doubt not that they will follow us. But for this day, thanks be to God, we are still alive and safe."

There was a twinkle in the girl's eye as she answered. "Aye, thanks be to God. I was sorely troubled a while back—for the safety of the bombards!"

THE END

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Cat of Gold

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON
Author of "Snake Doctor", "The Thousand Dollar Ear", etc.

With a yowl and snarl that ole bobcat went to work

Animals seemed to have a tacit understanding: Bring Mase McKay back alive. . . . First he dropped his roll on the dogs, then he lost his shirt on the ponies, and he ended up with a wreck of a cat worth a million to everybody but McKay

'TWAS a cold day in Miami. The norther rattled the dead fronds of the ancient cabbage palm beyond the door of the Railroad Hotel. It rattled also the ribs of young Mase McKay who was inside, hunched up in a cane chair. Mase shivered, and like the swamp cracker he was he faced the elements in only a two-piece cotton suit, Sunday shoes, a purple butterfly tie and no undershirt, for he was against attire which he called "tourist fixin's" for a he-man.

"Them babies, last night, was cruel," he murmured. His hard brown fingers mauled two losing ticket stubs from the dog tracks last night, and one from the horse race plant at Hialeah. "Boy, it's gonna be freezin' tonight, hitch-hikin' some trucker down the Key West road home. Now sometime, in this yere career o' mine I'd oughta got me a overcoat like them damn Yankees. An' mebbe some little inside pants like a swell guy."

Br-r-rrr! It was cold. Mase let the pasteboards drop to the floor. The tickets represented the biggest part of the forty-five dollars Mase had brought up with him from Jigger Key yesterday morning on the bus. He dropped them and his fingers came in contact with something familiar to a back swamp trapper and hunter such as Mase was. Yeah, boy, it was hair, and Mase glanced sidewise at something that had just oozed down in the next chair. It was sort of a misfit, long-haired cow

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or maybe a swamp bear, he thought, and then he saw pink ears under a blue hat. Yes, sir, this critter had nose and eyes and—a cigarette.

"The durn thing is alive, sure," thought Mase. Then he said loudly, "Hey, you!"

"What you pullin' my coat for?" said the thing in the chair, surprisingly and in a human voice.

"Coat? Oh, yeh, dam' if it ain't. Man, I never see a fur coat before. I read them millionaires wear 'em up north. Boy, it looks like coonskin."

"It is," said the other man, "you never saw a coon coat before?"

"Plenty—on coons where goddlemighty fitted 'em." Mase bent to look closer and his face grew grim. There was a worn spot about the size of a dollar on the pilgrim's coat near the pocket. Mase lifted it, peered, and grew grimmer and grimmer. Then he whispered:

"Man, yore in danger! Ef'n I tell the world all I know, yore wearin' the death-mark right now!"

"Yeah? I'm in danger all right, but what's it got to do with you or my overcoat? I notice that you played the dogs yesterday. Well, sucker, it's just cats that are on my mind."

"Cats, nothin'. Look at this mark on your fur? Yore wearin' old Hanneh's hide, that's what. Old Man Cap Johnson's pet Hanneh coon that strayed away from his camp down in the jungle two year ago and nobody seen hide or hair of her since. Ef'n that ol' Johnny Reb ever hear that, yore a goner. He's a mean gun-toter, Cap is."

The stranger hunched higher and eyed this lean brown man closer. "Say, you had a drink, or just nuts? A Hanneh coon, hey?"

Mase lowered his shoulders and whispered mysteriously. The hotel clerk was just remembering, and Mase was remembering that his proper business right now was to sneak out of the R.R. Hotel. Them dawgs last night took his room money and his breakfast money and he'd been sitting in this chair hoping to yawn his way out with the nonchalant air of a big dog-and-horse gamblin' man would have.

All in all, though, it was a pretty forlorn hope.

The coonskin pilgrim was getting sorer every minute. "Say, farmer, what's wrong with my coat? Got a death mark, has it?"

"Where"—Mase whispered—"you get this coat with Hanneh's hide worked up in it?"

"Philadelphia. And I'll add, it's paid for too."

"Mebbe so. Don't make no odds. The thing is that Old Man Cap Johnson warned everybody years ago about trappin' his pet coon. He told me ef'n I ever see a guy with a coon coat and it had a scald mark on it like what Hanneh got by upsettin' a crock o' hot greens on her while fightin' with his houn' dawg under the table, why I was to take action right then. Now I ought to yank this coonskin right off yore back, but I ain't one to be hasty. I'm one to give any party a chance no matter how guilty he looks."

"Thanks," said the young man dryly, "but this worn place on my coat may be due to pushing a pint of Scotch in and out the pocket now and then at football games, as I fear has been done with coon-coats. But, you know, you give me an idea, too. You swamp boys got guts and can stand up to a gun can't you? I got a job in mind and if you could pull it through maybe you could take Hanneh's hide back to hang on your fence or family altar."

"Gun-shootin'?" said Mase. "Well, guns has got me in jailhouse sometimes but I got a heart full o' good thoughts fer everybody except them dawg track fellers. Mister, I admit I don't eat till I git home to Jigger Key on account them dawgs."

"Dawgs, eh?" The stranger was thoughtful a moment. "I thought you looked like a sucker. Say, let's you and me go eat and charge it to the cat."

"Cat? What cat? Feller, you had a drink or you're plum' nuts."

"Just as I said. Cats are my racket. One old tomcat."

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MASE got up and eyed the clerk. Likely, escorted by this coonskin millionaire, he could ease out of the R.R. Hotel.

"Cats? I never did know 'em except a fightin', squallin' whelp Ol' Man Cap Johnson's got in a crate at his camp. It gives his houn's nervous tremors to listen. Now, stranger, are you aimin' to promote tomcat races in this yere town? Man, I thought of that last evenin'. Ef'n I could jest toss Cap's wildcat over the backstretch fence them racin' houn's would all finish in a hospital. Man, I'm sure with you on how to beat them gamblers."

"No," said the pilgrim. "My cat is so old he's mildewed. His mind is slipping and his legs are groggy. He sleeps all day and grunts all night wrapped in a silk blanket. But, boy, that damned wreck is worth a million dollars to me—if I can prove to my Aunt Jen that I've been a faithful custodian for his old age. She allows this Aurelius two thousand dollars a year expenses but she's cut my allowance off on account of what a Philadelphia lawyer and her Swede butler said about my night-clubbing a bit. You say McKay's the name? Well, McKay, I haven't a dime of my own. So I live on the cat's income. Let's go eat on him."

"You mean you let a dam' tomcat support you?" Mase shivered down the sidewalk after this pilgrim. Boy, did he want that cooncoat? "Well, Mister, here's a beer joint. I'm eatin' hot dawgs on yore cat."

"Make it porterhouse. I got to charge everything high to the expense account so Burgin, this dotty old lawyer, thinks Aurelius gets the best of care. Aurelius can't eat anything but patent canned food, and that's where I get the long end of this racket. I turn in bills for veterinarians, medicine, taxi rides and Beach hotels to make the audit look swell for Aunt Jen, but—"

"Yeh, and keepin' her cat at a dollar a day house so's you can hit them night clubs. Pass the mustard—on the cat."

The stranger seemed to have lost his appetite in moody silence. Then he broke out. "See here, my name's Frawley, Walter Q. Now, McKay, I've lost the cat. I took him to an animal hospital on account of some skin trouble, and Oscar, the Swede butler at my aunt's Miami Beach place, found it out. He got Aurelius away and took him home. Now, Burgin, the lawyer, is coming down day after tomorrow. Now if I don't have the cat back to show old Burgin how well I've cared for him, it's ruinous. That's where you come in, Mase. I daren't show up at the Beach place. My idea is that you can kidnap Aurelius, and I wouldn't show in the job. You'd have to be careful. El Choco, Aunt Jen's place, is next door to the estate of one of the big Chicago gang lords. He's got tough mobsters on guard."

Mase sugared the third cup of coffee. "Yeah? Gun-toters?"

"Yes, and Oscar pals with 'em. Aunt Jen's in Italy, and the house is closed except for Oscar and the caretaker. I got a passkey and I can get you in. It's you getting out that's the danger."

"I never did steal nobody's tomcat. Suppose he starts yowlin'?"

"He won't. He's a high-class Persian, and in his time he won all the blue ribbons at all the cat shows in the United States. Listen, Mase, if the butler has the cat when Burgin arrives and puts the knock on me, I'll be out of Aunt Jen's will. Burgin hates me anyhow. Come on over and I'll show you the lay of the land. I got it all planned."

Walt Frawley counted his change, paid the bill and entered six dollars up to the cat's expense account. Then he took Mase to a parking lot and in ten minutes they were crossing the causeway in a classy yellow roadster. Man, it was cold crossing the bay! Mase tried to pull the edge of the cooncoat over his knees. It was worse up Bay Shore road facing the Norther. Gloomy walls and rattling palms, and finally Walt passed a gate that opened on a curving drive beyond. He pointed to a half-hidden house, boarded-up and weather-stained.

"That's El Choco. Aunt Jen's a tightwad. She hasn't painted the dump since

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the last hurricane. I'm supposed to live here with the butler and that damned cat, but Aurelius and me been doing a bit of night life. I used to lock him in the rumble with a can of cat food until he caught some kind of eczema or something and then I had to take him to the hospital."

"You run around them night joints and you will catch something. What manner o' canned grub he eat? Canned mice?"

"He never saw a mouse in his life. Now, Mase, except for trying some kind of racket to get my cooncoat I know you're a good guy."

"Yeah. That's my weakness. All the time listenin' to some feller's grief an' woe, an' it gits me in jail. Well, what we do now?"

"Nothing until tonight. I'm just showing you the lay of it. There's a fast, little boat in the yacht basin on the bay side of the estate. That's your getaway. Now you know the lower bay, don't you? Suppose you make it to Fiddler Creek bridge on the Key West highway and I meet you there with the car. I know the road that far."

"Right by me. On my way to Jigger Key west'ard in the glades. I take this cat there and then what?"

Walt was driving slowly back to Miami, thinking moodily again.

"That's what bothers me. I'm about broke. Can you hide that animal out until I figure how to handle old Burgin? We got to have Aurelius looking as well as possible. When Burgin is satisfied, I can draw an advance. Fifty dollars for you, Mase if all goes well, understand?"

"Right by me. Say, I'm cold. Could the cat stand fer a drink?"

TWO highballs apiece helped Mase warm up. Walt counted his change again and chalked another item in the expense account. They ate again at a boulevard beer joint, and it was full dark when the little yellow car crossed the bay again, ran up the windy shore road and then finally past El Choco's gaunt expanse of wall and house.

Two blocks beyond, Walt backed his car under the ragged palms of a side street and started on foot for the seawall. Mase joined him and Biscayne Bay splashed him with cold spray. Now, if a guy only had a cooncoat? Mase had something on his mind again, and it wasn't cats. He listened to instructions as they squatted by the stone yacht basin where a little canvas-topped speedboat rocked. Walt whispered to Mase that the boat was gassed to go. Mase followed him, dodging shrubbery, to a side door of the great house.

The caretaker lived at the gate lodge, and the butler's room was in the south wing of the house, and the next estate was the beer baron's, patrolled by two gorillas every night. Walt added this additional information as they crouched by the door. Inside the small door a staircase wound up to absolute dark and it smelled musty.

"Now stick close." Walt whispered. "This door is to a master bedroom. The cat's room is next. One time, Aunt Jen had sixteen of 'em."

"It sure smells strong. Say, there's a light back of us—"

"Oh, Lord!" whispered Walt. "Oscar's room down the main hall! The door's open and somebody's with him. Those mugs next door. Come back!"

Mase was slipping down the hall. He never saw a butler in his life and he wondered what the critter looked like. Presently he was back, and Walt had the jitters.

"Oh, Lord, we better get downstairs, get out!"

"Hell, no! I come fer a cat. Say this butler ain't no great shakes. No uniform, silk pants or nothin' like what I read. Two other kinda slick guys with him, takin' this Oscar down a few bucks at poker. Let's throw 'em out after we start on the cat!"

"No—" Walt moaned and Mase clutched his fur sleeve. "Too cold to patrol next door so they came over here. Hard eggs, Mase. Back out—"

"Git yore cat. And say, I got a idea too.

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Gimme the coat. Gotta wrap this animal so he don't squall. Gimme this coat."

Walt moaned again. But he got out of the coat. He vanished into the dark bedroom while Mase put on the coat. When Walt came out with a bundle, he hurried to the stairs. Mase followed him down. At the turn, Mase shoved into a barred window. Man, he was surprised. A buzzer sounded, and then a gong, and all El Choco's halls clamored with echoes. Lights flashed on, above, below. Out on the side drive, Walt Frawley was having something much like a cat fit.

"You hit a burglar alarm in that window! Here, you damn fool—"

He hurled a silk blanketed bundle into Mase's arms and vanished around the house into the shrubbery. Mase heard shouts and footsteps on the stairs. He started for the seawall, and found a cooncoat wasn't so much for a sprint. When he reached the yacht basin, he saw three men under the porte cochere light and they were yelling. Two had guns out.

"Come cat," whispered Mase. "We leave quick."

The gang saw the boat vanishing from the seawall lights, and Mase winced as lead cut past his ears. He jerked the throttle wide. Man, this boat could sure go. He fell over the stern swivel fishing chair and then he saw a sort of locker or fishbox under the mahogany transom, and into this he dumped the wrapped-up, million-dollar cat. Then he got the wheel again and straightened out for the string of lights that marked the causeway. He saw the bridge finally and shot under it with all the headlights of passing cars above spotting that coonskin yellow coat.

"In a way, this feller remarked he didn't want no public notice, did he now?" Mase said to himself. "Hey, cat! Found a bottle o' Scotch in this cooncoat what Walt was so grieved about givin' up. Ef'n I hadn't put Walt in a bad spot with them gun fellers right close, I wouldn't had no cooncoat."

He took a drink; well, two drinks; and made another bridge. Then Biscayne Bay stretched ahead, a wide expanse of dark rolling water. When he passed the red lights of the Coast Guard air base nothing was in front of him except the dark keys stretching south to Cuba. Twenty miles more. Mase knew every slough and channel westward into the glades.

"Hey, cat! Come on deck an' have a snort o' hooch! We're rollin'."

No answer. Maybe Aurelius had passed out. Mase begun to have some doubt.

"A dead tomcat, now, ain't worth much to nobody. An' come to think, I never did see this Aurelius cat. I wonder if this nervous boy, Walt, was tellin' me all the truth? Mebbe I gits framed. Mebbe Walt uses me to swipe the fambly diamonds or something. Mebbe I should oughta stuck to bettin' them dawgs. Hey, cat, let's have another drink."

Not a sound from the fishbox. He slowed down, fixed the wheel and went aft. He pawed the baby blanket open dubiously. He switched on the awning light for another look.

"Hell, this ain't no cat. Yeah, mebbe so. Bones and hide with the hair wore off. A old gineral wreck, and them millionaires fightin' over him. They got him greased up with some kinda dope for his skin trouble. Itch an' warts mebbe. Hey, Aurelius!"

A hairless, mottled mummy opened one scabby eye and gaped at Mase McKay in artistocratic langour. He yawned and showed one yellow tooth and moved his bony tail disdainfully. Then he shut his eye and ignored Mr. McKay. Mase found some cans of patent cat food in the bundle, shut off the motor and read directions gloomily. He took another drink and tried to erase that whiskerless phantom from his mind. He dozed and tossed on the dark bay, and waited hours before he turned into Fiddler Creek between the mangrove banks and cautiously approached the bridge. Deputies and traffic cops and sometimes Coast Guard boys hung around that bridge noticing who went in and out from the 'glades channels.

If Walt Frawley wasn't at the bridge,

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this was going to be hard to explain down here where folks knew him. He couldn't go home to Jigger Key looking like a dang millionaire with a stolen boat and a dried tomcat. If Walt wasn't here, Mase had to get rid of this outfit quick.

But the first streak of dawn showed a yellow roadster by the bridge. There was another car, a big black sedan, and Mase came down to the bridge warily and at slow speed. He recognized Walter Frawley and started to yell. Then he saw the Swede, Oscar, and two other guys. The four were watching the speedboat. And they were all grim. One guy stood right by Walter and seemed to be whispering to him. Walt was nodding.

"Yes, that's the man! He broke in the house—stop him right here!"

Mase looked up from under the bridge. "Well, of all the idears! You drunk or nuts? Well, of all the—"

One of those slick townies had a blue pistol out now. He yelled at Mase McKay. "All right! Come alongside past the bridge, you!"

Walt yelled again. "Got my coat, too. I told you he'd be here. Go take him, boys!"

MASE looked ahead. He jerked the throttle wide open. That speedboat made a leap like Johnson's bobcat. A stretch of misty water led to the next mangrove bend and when Mase made the turn he nearly went overboard.

This demon had her nose up and her stern low in a burst of suds and she clawed mud with a roar that drowned out the shots that gunman cut loose up the channel. Mase got one look back at Walt Frawley and that young man was pale and sweating. Then the green mangrove barrier hid him. Mase took the next mile fast and then slowed. Headin' home, but home was where he didn't want to go. He'd been framed, that's what. A bunch of town slicks had lured him into burglary or worse. This guy Walt had done him wrong. Walt had wanted to grab him here and then lie out of his end of the job; claim the credit for capturing a swamp desperado and perhaps making his enemy, Oscar, believe it.

"Yeah, except fer the cat, it makes sense. But if that feller tried to entice me into house-breakin' fer money or something, he figgers I wouldn't. But he figgered I was a goodhearted guy and I'd try to help any guy who was in a jam. Yeh, he figgered me right. I shouldn't oughta laid my last two bucks on them racin' dawgs last night, and then I wouldn't been broke and git interested in some ol' woman's tomcat. I'm takin' another drink and headin' into Ol' Man Cap Johnson's camp. Hey, Aurelius, I'm gonna show you a cat what knows he's a cat what got blood pressure an' you never did have."

The sun came up, the wind went east and it warmed the great sawgrass swamps. Two hours later, Mase eased this speedboat across a shoal lake, kicked mud around a tiny islet of moss-hung oaks and slid her bow along a one-plank wharf jutting from a short shell beach.

Under the oaks was a palm-thatched shack hung with traps, lines, crab boxes, and all the rusty gear a swamp man collects. Surrounded by lean, hound dogs, Old Man Johnson's hairy ears showed back of his shotgun hammers. When the dogs saw that yellow coat across the beach they took to the brush to do their barking. Mase yelled: "Hey, Ol' Johnny Reb, how about cawfee fer a pilgrim? A pore wayfarer that can't go home an' needs a friend?"

Old Man Cap Johnson looked a long time before he answered. "Well, I reckon it's you, Mase. Nobody else git in without a guide. Is the sheriff any furder behind you than he was last time you goes to town?"

"I dunno. Some guys is tailin' me, mebbe. I been done wrong. Cap, I save you a little drink after a night o' sufferin' and mebbe some sin, and it ain't no white mule popskull like what you fellers make in yore mush kettles. Now look me over close and don't shoot."

Cap got the pint bottle through his

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whiskers. "Boy, you fool around this way with city fellers and some day you'll git hit by the dynamite o' God. What kind o' duds you got on and what for?"

"Coon coat," said Mase. "Now don't shoot. Hanneh's come home in a cloud o' glory. Don't shoot."

Cap came closer and smelled. He tossed down the rest of the pint and rimmed his pipe with a paw that hadn't felt soap since he helped hang an Alabama carpetbagger in '78. "Sit down," he said, "and see if livin' truth is in you. If it ain't—"

"Look at these coonskins. Look at this with the scald mark on it like Hanneh wore till she gits trapped, skinned and goes to Philadelphia. I took her off a feller. That ol' coon'll warm yore bones now, Cap, and here she be."

Cap looked at the coat. "Yo're jest a dam' devilin' liar, Mase. Hanneh was darker complected and the scald mark ain't big enough."

"She's a blonde now," grinned Mase. "Them Yankees dyed her like the rest o' the pore coons that gits worked up in this feller's coat. It ain't right. Man, I fetch Hanneh home and yo're ungrateful."

"Yeah," said Cap, "it's yore gineral reputation makes me suspicious. How far were them depitties behind when you see 'em last?"

"I dunno. Dunno who it was. Some guys on Fiddler Bridge hurt my feelin's by shootin' at me. I ain't one to stop and ask questions when folks start shootin' at me."

"What's this yere can stickin' out the pocket o' this cooncoat that yore tryin' to pass off on me?"

"Cat food," said Mase, "patent cat meat. Come on, make cawfee and we'll try the dang stuff. If it don't kill us, we'll try it on that wildcat whelp you got penned up since last fall. I'm curious to know what a millionaire cat lives on. Is that critter you got still tryin' to chew his way outa this box?"

"He's a mean varmint. Him and me would never agree on nothin'. I'm goin' to knock his brains out ef'n he ever lets me stick a hatchet between the slats. He makes the dawgs too nervous o' nights."

"Say," Mase said, squatting by Cap's fire hole under the thatch. "You know what? I'm goin' to introduce yore critter to Aurelius. This yere cat I got has swell manners. Even gun-shootin' don't git a yawn out o' him. This Miami Beach cat has got what they call glammer in movin' pitchers. Ef'n you ain't got big dough, he won't look at you."

"Cat?" said Old Man Cap'n. "You been drinkin', that's what."

"Come on out to this boat. That's why I headed to yore camp for. Ef'n I went home to Jigger Key them deputies would be hangin' 'round waitin' for me. Yeah, I got a stole tomcat, that's my problum."

"Cat?" repeated Mr. Johnson testily, but he followed Mase to the speedboat, climbed into the cockpit and gazed about. Mase opened the locker and hauled back the baby blue, silk blanket. Cap gazed down.

"Boy, that ain't no cat. It's kind of a greased owl or lizard."

"It sure's a cat. He's got a whole string o' medals an' truck to prove he's a cat. He's a big money cat like them old big money women on Miami Beach like to play with. This old Aurelius is kinda retired from cat shows on a pension, and that's where I aim to drag down some coin from them slick townies that wished him on me. Get me?"

"No," said Cap, "you gone fitified in the head, gamblin' in Miami. Man, have some cawfee and sleep this off. Jest devilin' Mase McKay again."

CAP was hostile when they went back to his shack and Mase chewed pan-fried bread and gulped what Cap called coffee. This wasn't Cap's week for visitors, especially with the law on their tail, for back in the swamp a-piece, he and Billy Cumso, the halfbreed Seminole, were indeed cooking up a little corn mash.

"You oughta holed up somewhere else, you an' that skinned owl," he said. "Don't want my dawgs catchin' ary skin trouble. I got one cat an' he's jest a worry. Mase, you tail out o' here an' quick."

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"Say," said Mase, "lemme borry yore bobcat. I'll trade you the cooncoat fer him, seein' he's gittin too big fer you."

"Take him off an' throw the crate in the lake," grumbled Cap, "I have to shoot rabbits fer him an' he's ungrateful. No more cats."

"It's a trade," said Mase. "Help me aboard with him. I'll sell him in Key West to somebody that worries me, like them Coast Guarders."

They lugged a wooden box onto Frawley's speedboat, and that box heaved with a whirling striped dun-colored ball of fury. The hounds raised a clamor of joy to see Cap's pet depart. Mase threw a piece of canvas over the crate, and shoved away. He didn't want to go home, but he didn't want anybody snooping after him when a swamp man was cooking a pot of popskull two miles back. Things like that start feuds.

"Ef'n I ain't careful, I'll git me some woe an' grief," thought Mase. "Fifty bucks that Walt said, and was I a sucker to fall for him? I'll hide this Aurelius out and then start a dicker with somebody fer, anyhow, two bits. Git shut o' this boat and drag the grass afoot to my own camp. Them depitties'll be at Jigger Key tellin' my ol' man, an' waitin' fer me. Mebbe I should oughta stuck to bettin' them dawgs."

It was high noon when he slowed across the swamp lake, into the big grass southward. Had to get rid of this durn craft that shone in the sun with brass and varnish. Once he made his trapping camp, got his shotgun and dugout and grub, the Law'd have a time tailing him.

He shoved on at easy speed around mud shoals he knew as well as a traffic cop knows his corners, musing on what messes a gamblin' man can get into. South, across the giant sawgrass, was Jigger Key, the McKay clan's homeland, but Mase wanted to make westward, along a tiny slough to his own swamp camp. Maybe this fancy craft couldn't make it into this hidden waterway where he could abandon it, safe for days from prying eyes.

"Hate to leave her out in the open where the Law would think, mebbe, I had some hand in this," he grumbled. "But there ain't no' mebbes' about it with that there sheriff—not fer me. Nope."

Then he looked lazily about. The motor purred easily and his cat cargo was peaceful. But he heard something. He swung the wheel hard.

Coming down the main channel, full head on him, was a business like boat, a heavier, more powerful cabin craft than his. He saw men on the cabin top. One was Walter Frawley in his tan pinchback coat, and the head of another man gleamed like a summer squash. If that gleamin' skull wasn't the Swede's, Oscar's, the Miami Beach butler, then snakes ain't snakes.

There were two other guys, one at the wheel and another squatting on the tiny foredeck. This last man had a rifle. They seemed as surprised as Mase McKay as they rounded the point on each other, but Mase was faster.

He opened the throttle, jammed the wheel harder and turned the speedboat full into the side grass channel before the other outfit could raise a yell. Then they saw him and they did yell, all of them. Walt waved his hat and yelled the loudest. The gunman stood up. The helmsman turned in pursuit and opened up his motor. They all yelled again. Mase thought he heard Walt pleading for him to stop, come back, quit the cat business.

"Not to me he ain't talkin'," said Mase. "Cross me up like that. Git me to pull a job and then turn me up so's he gets the credit for it."

He eyed the mud bar in the side slough. If he jammed on it he was gone. That heavy boat would crash a path to him.

He was a hundred yards in, dodging the first shoal, when the other outfit made the turn. The motor snarled, then coughed; the screw churned mud and made it. That was bad. Mase roared for the next bend, skirted the mud point and hugged the deeper water close under a fringe of mangroves. He couldn't see the pursuers, but

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he could hear them yelling. He kept going!

If there were any deputies with Walt, just one star-toter was to be feared in the big grass westward: Key-born conch, that guy, and a good swamp dragger. If Joe Pinder wasn't aboard, they wouldn't get another mile in.

Mase opened up, chancing the next mud point, hoping to be out of sight when he turned it. That would fool them for a minute. Then the wheel almost jerked from his hands, a tearing noise came from the hull.

"Rode a snag," Mase muttered. "Well, I knowed dawg gamblin' brings no luck: Goodnight, cats, I'm short-cuttin' in deep west'ard."

The launch had lurched and settled with a crashing snarl. Mase saw the drift cypress that had ripped her bottom. The canvas slid off the wildcat crate and the cat was up on his legs spitting at the sunshine. Mase dashed aft for the jump to the mud bank. The other craft was having heavy going beyond the point. Mase looked, hesitated, and jerked the stern locker open. Aurelius' scabby ears stuck out of his baby blanket and he sneered at the world.

"Come you," said Mase. "Somebody's gonna pay for yore ride."

He hauled the bundle out, and then halted as he had a thought. Let 'em worry. That mob wanted a cat, so give 'em a cat. He shoved the slat box over the locker and twisted at the tough wires with which Cap Johnson had hinged the lid. Then he shook and dumped, and a streak of clawing fury hit the locker bottom. Mase slammed the locker top down and felt the wildcat spring at it. He kicked the crate overboard and jumped to the mangrove mud. Five yards in, the green screen hid him. Aurelius squirmed under the blanket.

WHEN Mase reached the grass jungle behind the mangroves he stopped and looked along them to the point. The cabin boat had stopped but the motor kept on fighting. Mase crouched in the big grass. If his pursuers had looked across the point, they'd have seen him in the yellow cane. The boat backed slowly and charged the mud bar again. The motor coughed and muffled. They had all gathered aft to shift the weight. All except Walt Frawley.

Walt stood forward on top the cabin and he was staring out ahead. He waved his hand without a word and Mase slunk lower in the grass. Well, he was discovered, but they'd have to be good swamp draggers to take him on foot. He stood up now and grinned contempt and shook the blue silk bundle. Then he was surprised. Walt didn't raise an alarm.

Instead, Walt slipped over the bow. He fought his way shoreward, in swamp mud to his waist, unseen by his pals aft. He reached the mangroves struggling and mud-plastered, but he managed to squirm through. The gang on the boat had got the craft backed again and were once more charging the bar. The yellow-haired Swede was forward now watching the channel anxiously. None had noticed young Mr. Frawley's hasty departure into the jungle grass.

Mase was crouched low but he heard a gasping whisper. "Here, you damn fool, give me a hand. Where you going? What ails you?"

Mase peered up and walt saw him. He didn't yell. He whispered again, hoarsely: "God's sake, McKay, get me out of here. I'm in a fix!"

"Yeh," whispered Mase, "I heard you the first time. Yestiddy, you was in a fix, and me bein' a pore trustin' feller, lookit what happened?"

Walt floundered to him. "You got Aurelius? Thank God, you hung on to him. Boy, it's worth a million you didn't stop on that bridge!"

"Say, you drunk or nuts? You tried to flag me down, stop me. You tried tc turn me up with them deputies, or whoever they were."

Walt hung to Mase; his hands rubbed mud into the sweat on his brow. He was pale and red-eyed and all in. His pals out in the channel behind the shore

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mangroves were shoving the boat slowly around the point.

Walt hung to Mase's sleeve. "No, I didn't. I wanted you to get away, but I couldn't say so. One of those guys on the bridge had a gun against my ribs while I was asking you to stop. Don't you get it?"

"No," said Mase, "you done me wrong. I was throwed lead at. I near froze to death, and nothin' to eat since I git on this job. On top that Old Man Cap runs me off his camp when I needed a friend. I ain't had no luck since I connect with this damn tomcat."

"Me either," pleaded Walt, "come on, can't you hide us all till this blows over. I'm in danger."

"You always are when I meet you. I never seen such a guy. What's it now?" Mase turned south in the big sawgrass and Walt struggled on. "Yeh, come on. Gotta drink on you? I wouldn't smell this cat medicine so strong ef'n I had a snort o' hootch. An' how about them fifty bucks fer kidnappin' Aurelius? Yore boat's wrecked and yore cooncoat is vanished, but I got Aurelius, damn him."

"Yes, damn him. Mase, if we can keep this cat alive and kickin' till the first of the month, I pay you off. If he croaks, we all lose. Mase, I never had a chance after you tripped that burglar alarm. I got to the car and made south for Fiddler Creek as we agreed. But Oscar and those two tough lads saw me leave and they took after. They hauled up on me at the bridge. Oscar guessed that the launch would come along when I stopped there. So they grabbed me, and that mobster made me try to stop you. Oscar offered them a hundred apiece to get the cat back. But you kept going, so they hired this boat from the bridge-tender and followed you in the swamp. They made me come, too. Mase, the only way I could clear myself was to swear that you stole Aurelius and I was trying to get him back. Oscar wouldn't believe that of course."

"I wouldn't either, the truth bein' what it is. Listen, that crowd has got to the speedboat. She's a general wreck whoever she belongs to."

"Never mind that," Walt pleaded. "They'll think Aurelius is on board her, and when they find out—"

Mase suddenly grinned. "And when they find out—well, no matter what. Come on, you got seven mile through this grass and it's tough anyway you take it. Open water to cross twice and—"

There was some kind of crash behind the mangroves screen. Oscar and his pals seemed to be ripping things up on the speedboat. They had discovered now that Walt Frawley wasn't with them and they were yelling for him.

"Maybe he fell off in the mud when we hit that bar."

"If he took to the swamp he's through, said another.

"And it's all right with me if he is," Oscar called. "Let him go, Steve. All I want is that cat to show Mr. Burgin tomorrow, to prove how Frawley abused it. And hired some bum to steal it away from home."

"Hear him?" Mase grunted, "I told you they wouldn't believe you. You ain't any too much sense, Walt. I figgered you right away."

There were more curses and disorder on the two boats. Oscar raised his voice again. "Never mind lookin where Frawley went. Rip up everything and find Aurelius. That's all we want, Steve."

Mase raised up on a sawgrass hummock. He could just see their heads. They had searched the fore lockers and the engine pit amidships under the canvas hood. Water was coming in fast aft and Oscar splashed through the cockpit. Mase pulled Walter up where they could just see through the mangrove thickets. Oscar swore and jerked the stern transom open. Then he went down on his back and screamed. Something like a yellow flash had leaped, careened off his neck and leaped again.

"He wanted a cat," said Mase. "Well, he got a cat. Who's that feller named

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Steve? He lost his gun overboard when that Johnson cat kinda swiped him in passin'. Boy, lookit that wildcat streak mud."

Walt Frawley wiped mud from his eyes, but he didn't see much. Old Man Cap's pet glistened with water when it vanished into the sawgrass, shrieking panic and fury at every jump. Walt gasped.

"Was that a—cat?"

"Come on," said Mase, "that's all I waited for. Only thing is I'm disappointed that it wasn't you that opened that locker. Man, I figgered you a doublecrosser an' done me wrong. Come on, git outa here. Seven miles to my camp where we git a dugout. Twelve miles to Jigger Key. Fifteen miles to the Key West road. You can git a bus tomorry to Miami. But first how about them fifty bucks fer Aurelius, damn his bones?"

"I'll make it a hundred when I see old Burgin and he finds nothing much wrong with Aurelius. Oscar won't dare say much about me—if I can show up with Aurelius —damn his eyes."

"All right," said Mase. "But I'm goin' along with you tomorry to collect that dough fer Aurelius—damn his tail. No man can trust no man."

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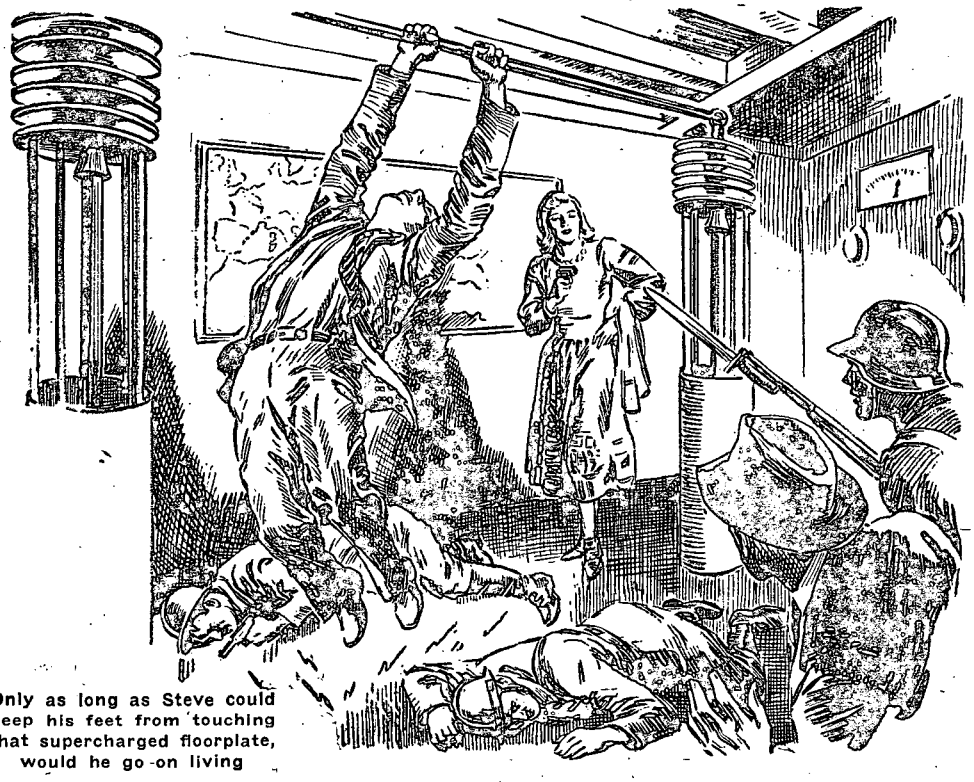
Upset in Utopia



Only as long as Steve could keep his feet from touching that supercharged floorplate, would he go on living

By D. L. AMES

PLAN G is just coming to maturity when they arrive for an unquiet honeymoon at SAN UTOPIA, Riviera resort spot of the republic (more or less) of VALPARADISO:

STEVE BRABAZON, of the British Secret Service (don't think the sun has set on *that*), who has gambling in his blood and the love of a fight in his heart; and

JUDY, his attractive and understanding bride, who knows he's nine parts wacky and adores him for it.

On practically their first night in the Casino, Steve discovers that VIKI LAMARR, fascinating blond "refugee" who entertains in the Taborine night club, is sending messages to Germany. It's done by tap dancing in code, no less, with a radio hookup from the Taborine.

And why these quaint messages? Well, it all has to do with Plan G; and Plan G is the result of prodigious mental labors on the part of one

SEÑOR BULBO, diplomat and visiting fireman from the neighboring state of GRAN FRIJOLE. A miniature Mussolini, this Bulbo, who would do anything for the Cause if it involved (a) advancement of his own ambitions and (b) plenty of suffering for other people.

VALPARADISO, for good and sufficient reasons, is anti-Nazi. It would help to consolidate Hitler's power in this part of the world if Gran Frijole, already well Nazorganized, could move into Valparadiso and take it over. Furthermore, this would mean war and a lot of human misery—which is Señor Bulbo's dish in any case.

But those stubborn citizens of Gran Frijole, delighted as they are with Nazi handouts, don't *want* to go to war with Valpara-

This two-part serial began in last week's Argosy

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diso. So it has to be done with mirrors—and Plan G. Shortly after three o'clock, two nights hence, Señor Bulbo's Black Squadron of fast bombers will take off from their base and reduce a couple of Valparadisan cities to smoking ruins.

So this tap dancing by Viki Lamarr, tipping off the boys in Berlin.

But for Steve Brabazon the evening is still very, very young. Before it gets well started, CARLOS DEL TORO, test pilot from the airdrome at CALLE DEL CIELO, is killed in Viki's dressing room; and POLICE INSPECTOR FERNANDEZ is happy to let it go as suicide.

Actually it is the work of the fine Teutonic hand of HERR SCHMIDT, Brazilian exporter, who is the brains of bulbous Bulbo's set-up.

And why this murder? Simple: Viki has already milked del Toro of all the aviation secrets she can get, and the lad has become tiresomely suspicious.

STEVE, arriving at the dressing room after Herr Schmidt's discreet departure, recognizes the strong aroma of Liederkrantz.

After doling out an admonitory black eye to the elegant DON ALDO FRANCESCO DEL ORTINI, Gran Frijolian assistant to Miss Lamarr, Steve takes over Viki for the evening. Much, it may be added, against her own wishes; for under Plan G she is duty bound to get out of town this very night.

After pleas, threats, promises, and an impulsive attempt to murder her escort—all of them ineffective—the lovely but nervous Viki leads Steve to the Café Conquistador, on the waterfront.

And the gang's all there, looking very tough indeed. Very, one might say, inhospitable. PEDRO SANDOZ, another aviator from the airdrome at Calle del Cielo, is among those present. Having sold out to the Nazis, he is now attacked by bleary absinthe-induced remorse; cries out against Plan G; and is promptly put to sleep with a bottle for his pains.

STEVE, fascinated by the nature of the entertainment but a little annoyed with himself for not bringing a gun, immediately announces that he is a British Secret Service agent.

This gets over as a gag—as Steve intended—until Herr Schmidt, recognizing him, calmly announces to the boys that it's so. Schmidt leaves, taking Viki with him; Steve takes a backward dive over the bar; and the lid's off.

Having disposed of the bartender with a left hook and captured his automatic, Steve turns his attention to the first man over the bar. "What's yours?" he suggests pleasantly. "A large brandy?" And brings the bottle smartly down on the man's head. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE LAW AT LAST

AFTER that, there was little time for light banter. The bottle in Steve's left hand flew wide of its mark, landing instead on that most prominent part of Señor Bulbo's anatomy, his uppermost chin.

The diplomat let out an old Gran Frijolian street cry and retreated hastily into a far corner of the room, where his compatriot Count Aldo had already taken refuge behind an overturned table.

Then things began to warm up. Steve ducked a chair which came hurtling through the air and crashed into the row of bottles behind the counter. He reappeared with a heavy syphon with which he sent the foremost thug soundly to sleep for the brief remainder of the night.

For a few moments it was chiefly an exchange of artillery bombardment—bottles and syphons on Steve's side, chairs, tables and other movable furniture on the other. The air was thick with free drinks on the house.

It was not until ammunition was beginning to run low that Steve heard the sudden sharp bark of an automatic. The bullet ripped through the padding in his dinner jacket and scorched his shoulder.

Quick as a flash Steve jerked up the gun he had appropriated from the bartender. It spoke a second before the would-be killer had taken aim to shoot again. The man, a ratty little creature with a scar across his left cheek, looked at his gun arm in dazed surprise, dropped his revolver and clutched at his elbow with a scream.

Steve dropped on one knee for cover. For he had seen half a dozen of the others grab for their guns.

It was a development that he had been half dreading, and half hoping for. Not that serious shooting was exactly Steve's idea of amusement. He preferred a good free-for-all where his beautifully balanced

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physique and perfectly coordinated movements could come into full play. He took a reckless, primitive delight in violent physical activity. Gun play was a grimmer game.

Luckily, however, it was a game which Steve for professional reasons had perfected himself in. In the present instance its chief disadvantage was that he must almost inevitably be shot. On the other hand the sound of gunfire must bring even the broadminded San Utopian police to the Café Conquistador.

The point was—which event would happen first?

THE question was nearly answered tragically at that very moment. A brief, sinister stillness had followed Steve's answering gunshot. Crouched behind the bar he could hear his unseen assailants creeping closer. His hand grasped the butt of his revolver firmly; but his forefinger toyed affectionately with the trigger.

They had started the shooting, and Steve had decided quite coldly that the first head that appeared over the edge of the counter should have it.

What he had momentarily overlooked was the fact that a man might crawl on hands and knees round the far corner of the bar, and sneak in behind him. And this is exactly what someone did.

Steve's life was saved by a cigarette case, a small bit of broken mirror and a large amount of pure luck.

As he waited scarcely breathing for the expected frontal attack his eyes caught a small triangle of broken mirror which had crashed down from the shelf behind the counter.

In the mirror, dimly reflected, the creeping form of a man was visible. Steve recognized the blue steel glint of the automatic grasped in his hand.

Steve pivoted like lightning. Simultaneously the gun spluttered not three yards away from him. The killer had aimed just below Steve's shoulderblades and he had aimed accurately. But the bullet, thanks to the rapidity with which Steve had spun round, caught him square in the chest.

Steve heard the metallic thud, felt the stinging pain, and stumbled back as though he had been kicked by a mule. His brain spun dizzily for a second and he wondered vaguely why he wasn't dead.

Then the truth dawned on him. The bullet had encountered the chromium steel cigarette case in his breast pocket. Afterwards he found that it had pierced one side of the case and been stopped by the second.

But meanwhile he had acted by pure instinct. Reeling, his finger closed on the trigger. The shot bedded itself wildly but harmlessly in the ceiling. But it steadied him.

He fired again, rectifying his aim. The would-be hero who had so nearly executed the successful flank attack whimpered and fell face forward among the débris behind the bar.

Steve fought against the groggy stupor which was the inevitable reaction to that stunning blow upon his chest. He lurched heavily against the counter, panting for breath.

He saw now that it was nearly all over. For the others were closing in on him like a pack of yapping hounds, eager to be in at the kill. He caught a brief glimpse of Señor Bulbo, standing on tiptoe on top of a distant table, his beady eyes popping out of his head with pleasurable excitement.

Steve's actions were still mainly instinctive. He raised his revolver and spent his remaining three cartridges on the chandelier which hung from the ceiling.

The third shot plunged the *café,* or rather what was left of the *café,* into darkness. At the same time someone landed heavily on his back. He staggered, threw the man off with an effort and brought down the butt of his now useless gun on a convenient skull.

HE HEARD a diabolical howl and for the next moment or two it sounded as though all the brighter fiends in hell had been let loose. Steve took advantage of the

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momentary confusion and darkness to crawl among the empty bottles under the bar.

For the time being he felt well content to let the others carry on without him. By the sound of it they weren't doing badly. It was almost a pity not to join in such a beautiful fight.

Steve recovered his breath softly, not that anything less noisy than a police siren could have been heard at that moment. He felt a moment's regret at having smashed up the liquor so recklessly. He could have done with a small whisky in quiet surroundings.

Which reasonable thought indicated that Steve was returning to normal again. He returned just in time.

For it was beginning to occur to the inmates of the Café Conquistador that it was really rather silly thus to continue half murdering each other in the dark.

One thug, gifted with the power of thought, recollected his pocket torch. The idea caught on, and in another moment the thick black velvet atmosphere of the *café* was probed by the shafts of a dozen searching beams of light.

Steve felt it was high time he took his bow and departed.

He broke cover, punched the first tough who shouted, and scrambled on to the zinc bar-counter. He moved swiftly, which was just as well. For someone lunged viciously for his legs. The attack would have swept him to the floor again had he still remained standing on the counter.

Actually Steve had made a dive for the heavy chandelier in the middle of the ceiling, praying that in the darkness he would find it and that it would hold his weight if he did.

His hands grasped the swinging pendant. He heard the fixture creak complainingly beneath his weight. But it held for a moment or two, which was all he needed.

Five or six beams of torchlight picked him out, swinging from the ceiling, a tyro's target. Half a dozen guns were raised, though there seemed to be no particular hurry to pop him off.

It was almost too easy. The gunmen hesitated, relishing the thought of the sport. What they had not realized was that Steve was not swinging in this acrobatic manner from the chandelier merely for the exercise.

They had forgotten the small unbarred window, covered with brown wrapping paper, high up in the wall opposite the bar. And before they had remembered it, Steve had performed his first, and nearly his last, trapeze act.

As the chandelier careened dizzily toward the high window he let go. His feet crashed against the glass. Luckily the brown paper had been glued to the window or the glass would have splintered into a thousand sharp-edged fragments.

As it was, he cut himself only slightly in five or six places. But the impetus of his swing had carried him through the window. He hurtled clear of the building falling from a height of about twelve feet into the street.

He landed on all fours, a little dazed, but miraculously with bones unbroken. He picked himself up gingerly, blinked, and found himself staring into the startled faces of two policemen.

CHAPTER VII

DEAD END

STEVE'S dinner jacket no longer retained that smart Saville Row jauntiness which generally characterized his appearance. Nor was it conventional to come sky-rocketing through a café window at four-thirty A.M. accompanied by broken glass and other wreckage, to land in the gutter at the feet of two policemen.

Steve, therefore, made no attempt to pass the thing off with the casual shrug of the shoulder, the nonchalant "Good evening officer" and the breezy wave of the hand.

His behavior was much more human. He turned tail and ran. The two policemen shouted excitedly and ran after him.

Steve's retreat was not so foolish as it might at first seem. For in the split second

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in which he had stared into the policemen's eyes a peculiar thought had struck him. They had been lounging against the door of the *café*, but had apparently made no effort to enter it.

And yet for the last quarter of an hour the infernal din must have suggested that every variety of assault and battery was taking place within.

Could it be that these two policemen were stone deaf? Or could it be that they were paid off to be stone deaf? Steve shook his head in gentle sorrow.

Flight was indicated.

As he rounded the corner he was glad he had not paused to argue. For by this time he was being chased not only by the two policemen—if policemen they really were—but by one or two of his pals from the Café Conquistador.

He plunged down a little alley which brought him into the maze of slum streets which lie behind the port. Steve did not delude himself. His pursuers meant business. His escape from the *café* had put each one of them on the spot, and his life at the present unfavorable rate of exchange was worth about one *peso*.

Luckily, from previous visits, Steve knew his San Utopia as well as he knew the palm of his hand. On one or two occasions during his doubtful past he had dodged up and down these same streets to avoid his more pressing creditors.

He was on his own ground, and he made the most of it. Within ten minutes he had shaken himself free of all his followers except one. He drew back in the shadow of a doorway. The man blundered past like a bloodhound with a cold in his nose.

But unfortunately in his enthusiasm the man had dropped a glimmering object with a clatter at Steve's feet. It was a stiletto. He paused to recover it. He saw Steve at the same time that Steve saw him. It was Don Aldo Francesco del Ortini.

It was almost with reluctance that Steve hit him. Punching Don Aldo in the face was becoming a habit. The aristocrat went down without a murmur, curling up with a dreamy little sigh against the wall.

IT WAS nearly five when Steve reached his hotel. He hadn't been out so late since he was married. He was somewhat battered and limping slightly as he approached the entrance. He wondered just what he was going to say to the very respectable and pompous doorman.

Then he halted. Though Steve's hotel was in the center of San Utopia, just opposite the casino in fact, the square in front of it was at this hour deserted. Or rather nearly deserted.

Lurking in the shrubbery just opposite the hotel entrance he saw a moving shadow. He looked again. The shadow was plainly that of a gunman, waiting to welcome him home.

The killer had not seen him yet. Very carefully Steve skirted his way around the corner of the building. On the side facing the sea each bedroom was supplied with a small private balcony. Steve and Judy's room was on the second floor. He eyed the balcony, calculating the strength of the creeping vine which ran up the side of the building.

Judy had gone to bed but not to sleep. During the last hour in fact she had become wider and wider awake. At every footstep in the corridor her heart beat quicker until by the time the clock struck five her nerves were frankly in tatters.

A hundred times she had told herself that Steve was perfectly able to look after himself, that he had promised to do nothing more tonight than angle tactfully for information. But Judy's brother had died in the secret service of his country and she had no intention of losing a husband.

Also a slight incident about an hour ago had increased her uneasiness. The telephone had rung. She answered it but no one had replied. It was either a mistake, or an obvious ruse to find out whether or not she was in her room.

Since the bogus 'phone call she was almost certain that someone had tried to fit a key into the lock of her door. The door was bolted, but the cautious sound had not lessened her nervousness.

Now suddenly she sat bolt upright in

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bed, listening. She was certain she heard the sound of someone stealthily moving not ten feet away. She switched out the reading lamp by her bed, holding her breath. The sound seemed to come from the balcony.

She crept hastily from the bed and tiptoed across the thickly carpeted floor to the window. She was sure now there was someone on the balcony. She climbed quietly on to a chair, just behind the heavy curtains. Though her heart was pounding madly there was a grim, set expression on her pretty face and her right hand firmly clasped the neck of a whisky bottle.

The curtains billowed; beneath them a man's foot appeared through the French windows. The shape of his head was already visible behind the velvet curtains.

Judy clenched her teeth and let go with the whisky bottle. The intruder pitched forward groggily and lay still on the carpet.

It was some moments before Steve opened his eyes. He nestled his head affectionately against Judy's shoulder, sighed, and closed them again. It was the end of a perfect day.

STEVE was awakened next morning at the civilized hour of ten o'clock by the fragrance of steaming coffee. Judy, looking fresh and pretty and as though she hadn't a care in the world, brought the tray to the side of the bed and put it down.

She examined Steve's bruises and scratches critically. "You look as though you'd spent the night inside a cement-mixer," she summed up judicially. "I suppose you tried getting fresh with our Viki and she gave you what was coming to you. How many times must I warn you to lay off blondes?"

Steve disappeared with a groan beneath the sheets. "Don't mention that woman's name before I've had a cup of coffee," he pleaded.

Judy poured out his coffee and buttered a roll for him. Steve came up for air.

"Tell me," he said, "when you biffed me in that big-hearted way with the whisky bottle last night did you *really* think it was someone else?"

Judy's smile was enigmatic. "Let it be a lesson to you not to leave me at home," she said, without answering the question.

Steve had finished his fourth cup of coffee and just begun that delightful ritual —the first cigarette of the day—before he screwed up courage to glance in the mirror. Actually Judy's estimate of his appearance had been unkind. Sleep and breakfast had done wonders for him. A shave and a hot bath, and he would be as fit as ever.

He pushed Judy, who was thoughtfully studying her features, gently away from the dressing-table mirror and got to work with two stiff hair brushes.

"The trouble with these glamourous blondes," announced Judy, who had obviously pondered the subject deeply, "is that, analyzed, they all look alike. Take me, for instance . . ."

"I'll take you and put your head under the tap," Steve said cheerfully, "if you don't stop talking about blondes."

"Take me, for instance," she repeated, ignoring the interruption. "Given an hour or two at the hairdressers, plenty of make-up and the correct moral outlook on life, and I'll bet I could do the Viki Lamarr stuff myself."

She threw back her lovely head until the soft gleaming chestnut waves of hair fell to her slender shoulders, and stretched out her bare arms in an attitude of invitation. Her pretty lips pouted in a very good imitation of one of Viki's most successful expressions, and she batted her eyes at Steve languorously.

"Darling," she murmured.

Steve threw a pillow at her.

Judy sighed. "You'd tumble head over heels for it if I weren't married to you," she complained. "Someday," she continued darkly, "I'm going to give you a shock."

Steve missed the usual pre-lunch session at the casino that morning, which gave Judy a good idea of the gravity with which he took the events of last night.

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HE SPENT what was left of the morning in a totally unsuccessful series of visits. First he called at Viki Lamarr's flat, to find that she had gone, leaving no address. There were rumors that she had departed for Panama, for Rio, even for Miami. But everybody seemed to agree that her reason for disappearing so abruptly was her natural upset over the tragic suicide of the love-stricken Carlos del Toro.

Steve wished he could believe that the explanation was so simple. His next visit was more ticklish—the Gran Frijolian Consulate. He was still wondering what on earth he was going to say to Señor Bulbo when he learned that the diplomat had left suddenly for Gran Frijole on the early train that morning.

Next he paid a call to the Café Conquistador. It looked as though a cyclone had struck it. But of the orphans of last night's storm he found not a trace.

Temporarily the *café* had gone out of business, at the moment having the builders and decorators in. He learned from a garrulous policeman that there had been a bit of a shindy here last night. He listened to the highly colored details of the incident with interest.

He loitered in the neighborhood, hoping to run across someone whom he might recognize from last night. Like Viki they all seemed to have faded away like a bad dream.

All morning Steve had stuck ostentatiously to crowded districts and main thoroughfares. And in spite of his characteristic lazy manner all his senses were on the alert.

But he had been quite unmolested.

Last night the other side had been willing to take the most desperate risks to remove him. This morning he was apparently being allowed to come and go whither the spirit moved him.

The explanation began to dawn on him. Instead of removing him they had removed themselves. Thinking it over, there was nothing very remarkable about their leaving him at large.

For actually what did he know? Precious little, when it came right down to it. He knew that Viki was sending code messages over the radio. But they hadn't guessed he knew that—and anyway Viki's disappearance had already put an end to the code messages.

He tabulated his actual knowledge mentally as he walked back toward the hotel. He knew a number of spies by sight—always provided they hadn't totally altered in appearance when next he saw them. He knew that there was something called Plan G—but what it was he hadn't the faintest idea. And he *guessed* from the word on Pedro Sandoz' lips before the airman had been knocked unconscious that Plan G was going to take place tonight. "As for tomorrow night . . ." Sandoz had begun, just as someone bashed him on the head.

The maddening inadequacy of that unfinished sentence was mental torture. Plan G—tomorrow. But what? And where?

He continued his mental tabulation. He knew that Señor Bulbo, according to Steve's inside information not very popular with the Gran Frijolian government, was connected in some way with it.

But most interesting of all, he decided, was the thing he had stumbled on to at the very beginning of last night's adventures. Namely del Toro's murder, and the fact that del Toro had worked at the experimental aerodrome at Calle del Cielo.

He found Judy waiting for him in the hotel lounge, giving a fair imitation of a dutiful wife trying to control her curiosity.

"I've discovered just the place for us to have lunch," he announced cheerfully. "A picturesque spot a few miles down the coast called Calle del Cielo."

CHAPTER VIII

TWO WOMEN—OR THREE?

CALLE DEL CIELO is a tiny village a few miles north of San Utopia on the Avenida del Mar, which hugs the rocky coastline. The promontory, on which it huddles, encloses as in a jagged elbow of rock, a small and sheltered bay

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where a few years ago nothing more exciting than fishing boats rode at anchor.

Now this small bay had become a base for seaplanes; and though it looked as blue and picturesque as ever, it was one of the most closely guarded stretches of water in Valparadiso.

The aerodrome was on the edge of the bay, a series of low concrete buildings so beautifully camouflaged that a hundred motor cars passed daily along the main road within a few hundred yards of it without so much as suspecting its existence.

Only a gate at which two sentries with fixed bayonets stood showed that the village differed in any way from the other fishing villages along the coast.

This gate was the only entrance to the aerodrome. Otherwise a double fence, extending in a semicircle from water's edge to water's edge, insured the privacy of the grounds. The outer of these two fences was barbed, twenty feet high, and fitted with ingenious burglar alarms.

An enemy spy had once somehow succeeded in scaling this outer fence. The sentries, arriving a moment later, had found the unfortunate fellow burnt to a cinder. He had attempted the inner fence and the inner fence was nothing but an electrical system of high tension wires.

As for penetrating the bay by boat—that was only another and even more violent way of committing suicide.

But of these grim facts Calle del Cielo gave no indication that clear sunny day as Steve and Judy drove toward it along the picturesque Avenida del Mar. Still half a mile away, they were admiring a fine view of the pretty little fishing village in front of them when a dramatic incident awoke them to realities with a jerk.

THE event which gave Steve and Judy some idea of the aerodrome's secret was a pure accident, though as it happened it very nearly proved to be a fatal accident.

Steve had pulled up the car on the crest of a hill to have a good look at the village and bay stretching beneath them. He heard the distant splutter of a seaplane, rising to a high-pitched steady drone.

Then across the bay below the seaplane swept like a monster waterfowl—tracing a silver path of foam across the bright blue water. They watched it splash and leap into the air, a lovely sight as its silver wings flashed in the golden Mediterranean sun.

Taking off to seaward the plane gracefully banked, and rose beautifully in a spiral, sweeping back toward land straight in the direction of the cliffside where Steve had stopped his car.

Steve saw that it would pass almost directly over their heads. Steve, who had never got over a certain boyish excitement about aeroplanes, watched it entranced.

Then suddenly he heard again that spluttering cough, as though of a choked carburetor. But this time it did not give way immediately to the healthy high-pitched drone. Instead it grew worse and the plane, which was by this time coming dead on to them, seemed to dip slightly.

What happened next took less time than it takes to describe it. In a flash Steve realized that the plane was stalling, that if it lost any more height it must inevitably crash into the cliffside bang on top of them.

He heard the deafening roar of the one good engine and ducked down instinctively, dragging Judy to the floor of the car with him. At the same time the careening monster swept over them.

Its breath was like the breath of a hurricane. One of its pontoons scraped the radiator cap of the car. But it cleared them, hurtling onward for perhaps fifty yards before it smashed into a clump of dwarf pine trees. There was a ripping, tearing scream of trees and twisted metal; then the proud plane half turned over and settled down on the stump of one broken wing.

Steve had already leaped from the car and was racing toward the wreckage. It hadn't caught fire yet, and the quicker the

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pilot was helped out of the debris the better—if the poor devil was still alive. He reached the door of the cockpit, praying that it hadn't been jammed.

Actually the seaplane had not been very badly damaged. Steve wrenched open the door. What he saw inside made him whistle.

There was no one at all inside! The plane had no pilot. Only a very complicated control board, the nature of which Steve grasped after a moment's bewilderment.

The seaplanes sent out from Calle del Cielo were piloted by distant control. They were operated by radio.

Any further curiosity that Steve might have had about the Calle aeroplanes was interrupted at that moment by the hasty arrival of a car full of excitable officials which had come shooting up from the village below.

They chased him off unceremoniously and took charge of the wreck. Steve rejoined Judy thoughtfully and drove down into the village. They had lunch and afterward Steve took a little stroll by himself, arranging to meet Judy in the car parked in the square in about fifteen minutes.

Calle del Cielo, like all Valparadisan villages after the midday meal, a sleepy little place. A few colorfully squalid fishermen's dwellings, a restaurant, a garage, a general store and about half a dozen so-called *cafés* made up its chief attractions.

From the tourist point of view five minutes exhausted the possibilities of the place and Steve, vaguely disappointed, was about to amble back to the car when he caught sight of something which opened up new vistas of mental speculation.

THE two sentries at the gate of the aerodrome had already eyed him indifferently once or twice, when at the approach of an officer and two other men from inside, Steve saw them come smartly at attention and present arms. They were being relieved. Having nothing better to do, Steve watched this not very exciting changing of the guards.

Suddenly his heart gave a jump. For the weak, dissipated face of one of the relieving sentries was familiar to him. It was Pedro Sandoz.

Steve withdrew into the shelter of a doorway before Sandoz could see him, blessing his lucky star for the hunch which had made him come to Calle.

The appearance of Sandoz had suddenly brought some shape into the nebulous affair. For the first time Plan G began to assume a definite outline.

Del Toro's murder, the pilotless planes, a bona-fide sentry who was working for Schmidt—tonight's plan could almost be guessed. Steve felt that it must be some kind of a scheme to steal the designs of these radio-controlled seaplanes.

As it turned out Steve's guess was wrong—Plan G was far more complicated than that—but it gave him something definite to work on.

He could, of course, go at once to the proper authorities and reveal what he knew about Sandoz. Sandoz would be arrested and possibly Schmidt's plans would be upset. But Schmidt, Viki and the others would escape scot free.

Steve decided to do a little snooping on his own before taking the matter higher. He watched the two relieved sentries—who were now apparently off duty—cross the road and enter a café opposite. It was called the *Café del Rey*—and it was the favourite *cantina* of the men stationed at the aerodrome.

Keeping out of Sandoz' sight he followed them. He took a seat in the corner and ordered a drink.

The Café del Rey was a very ordinary sort of place, its chief claim to fame being the ancient and wheezy mechanical piano to which its clients could dance, if they were lucky enough to be tone deaf.

Steve, reminding himself that the late Café Conquistador had also seemed ordinary, sipped his drink and kept his ears and eyes open.

A fat, garrulous, motherly soul ran the place, and though she was more than eager to talk, Steve, at the end of a fifteen

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minutes unbroken discourse by her on the subject of the weather, the unhappiness of married life, and the splendors of Gary Cooper, remained almost as ignorant as he had been when he arrived. He learned, however, that the *café* kept open all night, "as the dear brave boys liked a little drop of something" when they came off late sentry duty.

He also noted that the *café* boasted three or four uncommonly pretty barmaids, obviously imported from San Utopia. These too, the old woman explained to Steve with a knowing smile and a nudge, were for the "dear brave boys."

"They are beautiful, señor, no?"

"Madame, they are beautiful, yes."

Steve regarded them with approval and ordered another drink.

"I think I'll join the Air Force," he said.

And when he saw the girl who brought his second drink he almost wished the proposition were practical. Her name was Maria, and Steve being human though married, caught his breath as he saw her.

A warm, dark Southern type, her vitality was like a living presence in the room. You could imagine men knifing each other because of her. And you could imagine her encouraging them to do so.

Her hair was black and lustrous and fell in careless ringlets to shapely shoulders. Her dark eyes slanted slightly, hinting at nameless delights. The inviting curve of her scarlet lips was a challenge. In brief, she was a knockout.

Her costume in every detail was that of a typical Valparadisan peasant, colorful and flamboyant, and it suited her perfectly. Not until some moments later did it strike Steve that she was dressed almost too carefully for the part.

At the moment he could only try not to stare at her.

Then suddenly *she* was staring at *him.* He saw the pupils of her eyes dilate and for a second she paused. He sensed rather than saw the tautening of her lithe body beneath the swinging folds of her peasant dress.

MARIA'S hesitation was so brief as to be almost unnoticeable. The next moment, with a flirtatious smile which seemed to be instinctive with her, she put Steve's drink down on the table before him.

But he fancied that her white hands trembled slightly. Nor were those slim hands the hands of a peasant. Steve tipped her generously. He suddenly felt expansive. Maria, with a pleased little laugh, pocketed the money hastily and withdrew.

"The señor must excuse Maria," the old woman apologized to Steve. "She is very shy. She has just this morning arrived."

"She'll get over her shyness," Steve commented dryly.

Steve did not hurry over his second drink; for the Café del Rey had suddenly become a place of absorbing interest. But Maria did not reappear. He tried to recall her appearance in detail fitting it in with the fantastic theory which had leaped into his mind.

Was Maria the explanation of Viki Lamarr's disappearance? It seemed too good to be true. But the low-heeled shoes would account for their faint discrepancy in height. The peasant costume would give the impression of a slightly more rounded figure. As for the fact that Viki and Maria were totally different types, Steve recalled Judy's lecture of this morning on the subject.

Thanks to hairdressers and the universal habit of making up, it was easy for women to change their appearance. Judy did it almost every time he let her loose in a beauty parlor.

He remained half an hour without catching further sight of Maria. The fact that she kept out of sight only strengthened his suspicion that she was Viki Lamarr. Recollecting finally that Judy would be waiting for him in the car, he went. But he determined to become a regular client of the Café del Rey.

To his surprise Judy was *not* waiting in the car. Instead a very smartly turned-out gentleman in a green felt hat and pale lavender spats was lounging luxuriously in

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the front seat, reading the latest number of *Prensa*.

He glanced up at Steve with a casual flip of his well-manicured hand. "Howyah doin'?" he inquired amiably, in his own version of Yankee slang.

Steve beheld Don Aldo Francesco del Ortini with mixed emotions. The most predominant, however, was dislike, and the Don should have recognized the aggressive set of Steve's jaw.

"Where's my wife?" Steve asked with dangerous brevity.

Don Aldo shrugged. "Search me," he said. Then, clicking his teeth in mild reproof, he added a word of advice. "Listen, guy. You ought to take better care of your wife—a good-looking dame like her." And he spat smartly into the road.

Steve had no right to jump to conclusions, but Don Aldo's words sent a thrill of unreasoned fear through him. He seldom got panicky, but the hint that anything might have happened to Judy roused a mad devil in his brain.

His left hand closed on Don Aldo's collar with such abrupt violence that Don Aldo's front collar stud burst. He jerked Don Aldo savagely out of the car.

"Now what's happened to my wife?" he rasped.

Don Aldo's reply, which was to the effect that he honestly didn't know, was inaudible, due to the fact that Steve was systematically strangling him.

CHAPTER IX

CARDS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

LUCKILY at that moment Judy herself tripped cheerfully out of the beauty parlor across the street. Steve saw her with a surge of relief. He might have known that she would have seized the opportunity to indulge her addiction to fooling around with her hair-do. Since she was wearing a neat and fashionable turban which entirely covered her hair, today's visit seemed even less necessary than usual.

Steve shrugged philosophically and relaxed his grip on Don Aldo's throat. Don Aldo sank down gratefully on to the runningboard of the car.

"Don't let me interrupt," Judy apologized. "I could always go back and have my nails done if the discussion is private."

Judy's threat to leave him alone with Steve again roused all Don Aldo's instincts of self-preservation.

"Don't go, lady," he pleaded earnestly. "You two have got me all wrong. I'm on your side, see?"

They explained that they didn't see. Don Aldo became greasily confidential.

"It's like this," he said. "I don't want you to get hurt—a nice young honeymoon couple like you. Now if you just go on minding your own business you won't get hurt, see?"

Steve considered the advice gravely. "What do you think?" he asked Judy.

"Sounds very sensible," Judy nodded.

"We'll think it over," Steve promised Don Aldo.

Don Aldo nervously readjusted his necktie. "There's just one other thing," he added reluctantly, as though hating to bring up the subject. "I gotta keep my eye on you."

"The black one or the blue one?" Judy inquired unkindly.

Don Aldo squirmed uncomfortably and edged away from Steve. "Can I help it," he complained pathetically, "if this guy takes a sock at me every time we meet?"

"Try not meeting quite so often," Judy suggested.

Don Aldo sighed wistfully. Not meeting Steve again would have suited him fine. But he had had his instructions. Those instructions had been not to let Steve out of his sight. And they had come from Schmidt personally.

"We're going back to San Utopia," Steve announced. "Can we give you a lift?"

Don Aldo hesitated. The thing was wildly unprofessional, but it would certainly simplify the task of keeping an eye on his quarry. Within five minutes he was regretting his decision.

For Judy drove.

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And Judy at the wheel of a high-powered car on a twisting coast road was a nightmare experience which called for grim courage. Fortunately the ordeal was brief. But Don Aldo was a nervous wreck as the car pulled up in front of the hotel in San Utopia.

"She's learning to drive," Steve explained apologetically.

"I'm going to have a drink," Don Aldo murmured feebly.

Steve had two reasons for letting Don Aldo share their company that afternoon. One—in which he was disappointed—was the hope of finding out something further about Plan G. The other and more important was that so long as Don Aldo was by their side they would be left unmolested. He was their life insurance.

Besides Steve really had nothing to do until night. The afternoon passed pleasantly, and that evening the three dined together.

IT WAS Don Aldo who suddenly suggested a few hands of poker. They had just finished a very expensive meal at an exclusive rendezvous of the rich curiously named the English Chop House.

Now it occurred to Aldo that if he won say a couple of thousand francs from Steve before the bill was presented, he might make the gesture of offering to split the bill. Aldo had dined extremely well and was full of generous impulses.

By an odd coincidence he was carrying a pack of cards on him—a very pretty pack of cards which had this peculiarity: Don Aldo could read them from the back almost as easily as from the face. As it happened Steve knew the address of the actual shop in San Utopia which sold them. He smiled at Judy.

They pushed aside their coffee cups and Aldo dealt out three hands. The first two or three rounds were played for small stakes. They were won by Steve and Judy alternately.

The technique was as old as card-sharping. First by a few easy wins you lulled your intended victims into a sense of false security. Then gradually the stakes rose and the slaughter began.

It was just beginning when Steve smiled a second time at Judy. Judy immediately spilled her coffee over the pack of cards. Her apologies were profuse, but the cards were ruined.

It spoke well for Aldo's aristocratic breeding that, apart from a volley of unmentionable oaths in a foreign tongue, he scarcely flinched. A new pack of cards was brought by the waiter and Aldo, always a philosopher, consoled himself for the loss of his marked cards by dealing himself a flush in spades off the bottom of the pack.

The betting began cautiously. Aldo did not wish to frighten his prey too soon. It was not until there was a tidy sum on the table that Aldo showed his teeth. He raised Steve a cool five thousand francs. Steve raised him a further five thousand.

Aldo concealed a little smile of pity and raised again. Steve saw him. Aldo showed his flush almost apologetically, and leaned forward to rake in the money.

Steve put down four aces.

Aldo swallowed and choked slightly. His eyes started out of his head in fascinated horror. He had never before been subjected to hallucinations and the experience unnerved him.

For he could have sworn that he had dealt Steve nothing better than a pair of kings. He stared at his flush, Steve's four aces, and wistfully at the pile of money on the table. Then at a gulp he finished a double brandy and ordered another.

AFTER that the game got serious. Sweating freely Aldo settled down to it. From an early age little Aldo had shown an aptitude for cards. In New York he had worked his way through night school by skilful manipulation of cards. It was due only to carelessness one night in removing one ace from his cuff that his scholastic career had been cut short. That was the occasion on which he had deemed it advisable to leave New York suddenly.

Was it that his fingers had lost their cunning? He watched Steve uncomfort-

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ably, an awful suspicion growing in his mind. Surely Steve could not be such a doublecrossing cad as to cheat too!

Aldo never learned the answer to that question. For if Steve was cheating (which of course he was) even Aldo's practiced eye could not detect it.

In half an hour Don Aldo Francesco del Ortini was a sadder though not very much wiser man. The sparkle had gone from his eye, his zest and high spirits had departed. With them had departed the entire contents of his wallet, his gold watch and his gold cigarette case. He slumped back in his chair, a haggard and puzzled man.

Steve and Judy had risen, thanked him warmly for his hospitality and left the restaurant before Count Aldo recovered himself. He leaped to his feet and started after them.

Then came the unkindest blow of all. The manager of the restaurant, a swarthy Argentinian who had been a bandit before hitting upon this more profitable form of robbery, sidled up to him suavely with a bill for six hundred pesos.

Don Alvo looked at it dumbly, and the manager's smile remained suave. Don Alvo protested weakly, and the manager's smile became less suave. Don Alvo explained hastily that he would pay the bill tomorrow, and the manager collared him unceremoniously, took him into his private office and telephoned for the police.

CHAPTER X

THE WINGS WILL FLY

IT WAS about eleven o'clock that evening when Steve and Judy entered the Café del Rey in Calle del Cielo. Rather disappointingly, their entrance caused no stir at all. The old woman, Steve's talkative friend of the afternoon, in fact, welcomed him cordially. Even Maria, who was dancing to the mechanical piano with an Air Force officer, flashed Steve a warm smile of recognition, looking Judy up and down with the suspicion of one beautiful woman toward another.

They had a cup of coffee at an inconspicuous table in the corner of the room.

"I think, Steve darling," Judy said after half an hour of the mechanical piano, "you're crazy."

Steve nodded despondently. He was thinking the same thing.

This afternoon he had allowed his vivid imagination to run away with him.

The Café del Rey seemed to be as aboveboard as the Bank of England. As for Viki and Maria being the same person, no woman, he decided reluctantly, could have changed her personality so completely.

He was about to call for his bill and go when the management of the Café del Rey made its first mistake. It presented his modest bill a moment before Steve had decided to ask for it.

A slight matter to build hope upon—but it suddenly gave Steve the sense of being hurried. He settled back into his chair again and ordered a whisky and soda.

Then the waitress made a second blunder. She explained that they did not have any whisky when Steve could clearly see half a dozen whisky bottles on the bar.

Steve pleasantly begged her to bring anything they had, and hummed the refrain of *"She was poor but she was honest"* under his breath. Judy recognized the symptoms, and her breath came quicker.

"They're trying to get rid of us," Steve murmured. And every muscle of his lean body tensed at the thought.

That next half hour was a silent battle of stubborn and conflicting will power. And the longer it continued the happier Steve grew.

He got his drinks; but the waitress clumsily spilled them all over his knees. The manageress explained tactfully that they were closing early that night. Someone rolled the mechanical piano over beside them so that the unmelodic din was deafening. The sandwiches they ordered were green with mildew.

Steve and Judy remained perfectly good-

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humoured, giving the impression that the Café del Rey was their spiritual home and that they were likely to stay all night.

But one fact was remarkable. There was no effort to get rid of them by physical violence. The reason for this was not hard to guess. If the Café del Rey was to play its part tonight in Plan G, the last thing they wanted was a rumpus which might bring in the police.

At a little after one Steve took pity on them and rose. He had found out all he wanted. He could almost feel the wave of relief which speeded their departure.

THEY drove about half a mile back towards Monte Carlo when Judy drew up the car. Steve got out, and Judy drove on. She had her instructions, which were to go home at once, lock herself in her bedroom, and not bean her husband with a whisky bottle if he happened to return late via the balcony.

Then, cautiously, Steve retraced his way back to Calle del Cielo.

The Café del Rey backed against a cliff one side of which tumbled precipitously into the sea nearly a hundred yards below. It was a picturesque position, but Steve's chief interest in its was not artistic.

In his seemingly casual inspection of the locality this afternoon he had noticed that a disused footpath lead up from the rocky cove below to the kitchen quarters of the *café*. He was interested in these back quarters of the *café;* for he had noticed this evening that on two or three occasions Aerodrome guards had disappeared therein with a pretty barmaid, presumably to have a drink in private. Not wishing to appear too curious he had made no effort to explore these regions.

Now, however, he utilized the old footpath to approach the rear of the *café*. There was no moon that night and even the stars were obscured by light cloud. The rocky cliff side was a mass of stunted undergrowth, cactus and prickly pears, and climbing was both hard work and perilous.

Fortunately the aerodrome late restrictions were carelessly enforced and Steve guided himself by the strips of light escaping from the back windows. He had climbed within a stone's throw of the top when he dislodged a loose stone, sending it banging and crashing down to the cove below.

He lay still and held his breath, thinking that all Calle del Cielo must hear that infernal racket. To his amazement a voice sang out softly not five yards behind him. The language was the argot of the San Utopian slums, and the import of the words was that Steve was a cursed, clumsy fool.

For a moment Steve was thunderstruck. So he was not the only one who was using this ancient footpath tonight! His brain clicked swiftly. There had been anger in the voice which addressed him, but not surprise. Which meant that the unknown was expecting others to be here tonight. Steve gambled on the accuracy of that theory and in the same dialect growled out: "Sorry."

Then cautiously he crept aside from the path on to a stony ledge sheltered by a mass of shrubbery, and lay very still. In another moment he heard the man scrambling up the path.

THERE were two men. He could not see their faces in the darkness, but their clothes were ordinary and each carried a suitcase. They continued toward the back entrance of the *café*. He heard the door open and shut behind them.

Steve breathed softly. It seemed that not all the clients of the Café del Rey arrived in the normal way by the front door. He knew a rising sense of excitement.

But he proceeded with extreme care. The fact they had not challenged him suggested that other visitors were expected by the same entrance. His caution was justified. He had nearly reached the back wall of the building when he heard more footsteps approaching.

He took cover again and held his breath. This time three men passed him and were admitted into the back door. All were carrying suitcases.

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He waited until all he could hear was the murmuring of the waves a hundred yards below and an occasional late motor car on the main road in the distance.

Then he moved silently toward the house.

He blessed the narrow strip of light which showed on each side of the window; it was perfectly suited to looking in without being seen.

What Steve saw in the back parlor of the *café* was extremely clarifying. In a flash it allowed him to solve the mystery of those suitcases and to grasp the basis of Plan G.

The tableau was not very edifying. Perhaps it is as well that the lighting was soft and seductive. It consisted of two sentries from the aerodrome who had not yet gone on duty. With them was the fascinating Maria, and as Steve watched her do her stuff his eyes narrowed. The technique was unmistakable. Only one girl could get away with reducing two ordinary straightforward young men to a state of blithering imbecility so swiftly and skilfully.

And that girl was the fascinating and accomplished Viki Lamarr.

Steve recognized her every gesture, her slow languorous way of looking at one man affectionately while fondling the other. As Don Aldo had accurately expressed it, the dame was lethal.

The two men were literally eating out of her hand. Steve saw a half-finished bottle of champagne beside them. They weren't exactly drinking it out of her slipper, but they would have, had she suggested it.

Then Steve understood the nature of that champagne. Already one of the sentries' head was drooping groggily. The other gave a little sigh and settled down on his side, breathing heavily. In less than the count of ten both had passed out.

Steve guessed it would be some time before they came to. The champagne was obviously drugged.

Viki, with sudden brisk efficiency, inspected them and wasted no time. Steve saw her go to a door, open it and return with two other men. These new men were dressed in uniforms identical with the uniforms of the two drugged sentries.

But Steve knew that they were not genuine sentries. For one of them had been in the Café Conquistador last night. This explained the mysterious visitors who entered so stealthily by the back door. And also it explained the suitcases. The suitcases contained Air Force uniforms.

STEVE watched the disposal of the two drugged men. They were piled unceremoniously in a corner cupboard where three or four of their fellow guards were already obliviously sleeping.

Then Viki gave the two new men their instructions. Steve unfortunately could not hear what she said, but they saluted her smartly and went through into the public front part of the *café*. Steve heard their footsteps crunching across the main street in front of the *café* and guessed that they were proceeding toward the gate of the aerodrome.

For the first time Steve realized that Plan G must be something far greater than a simple theft of air designs. One spy introduced into the aerodrome might have accomplished that. But in was plain that Viki was systematically replacing every sentry in the place with her own men.

Steve reluctantly came to the conclusion that it was too big a job for him to handle alone. It was tempting, but he had no right to risk it. His only course was to get in touch with the authorities at once.

But the decision was suddenly taken out of Steve's hands. He had been so wrapped up in the sight inside the *café* parlor that he had not heard the stealthy approach of the man coming up the cliff path behind him.

He spun round, his heart in his throat. The newcomer was a big man, about Steve's size. He put down his suitcase and stared at Steve in wonder. Then, in the beam of light escaping from the window, they recognized each other. It was last night's tough dock labourer, known to the few as O.M.17.

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Both men sprang at once. But O.M.17 lost a fraction of a second by grabbing for his gun. It was important that that gun should not go off. As Steve's grip closed above the man's right hand there was the sound of breaking wrist bones, and the gun went spinning down the cliff.

SPEED and silence were essential, and Steve fought with a cold, swift mercilessness born of necessity. Luckily that struggle did not last long. Steve's left connected like the report of a revolver and O.M.17 never knew what hit him. The sheer brute force of the blow sent him reeling backward over the cliff. Steve heard his body crashing down the steep path, heard the distant muffled plop as it hit the water.

Steve suppressed a slight shudder and regained control over himself just in time. For the sound of the struggle had brought someone to the back door.

"What's the matter?" a guarded voice demanded.

"I stumbled," Steve returned, adding a few unspeakable curses just to make the thing sound convincing.

"Well hurry along. You're late."

Steve grumbled out something in argot, grabbed up the suitcase and came forward. It would be death to do otherwise. The man at the door watched him approach but scarcely glanced at his face in the darkness. He was shown into a cellar, where by the light of a single candle one or two other men, morosely minding their own business, were changing into Air Force uniforms. Their faces were new to Steve.

He opened O.M.17's suitcase and crawled into the uniform he found inside. It fitted him reasonably well. Then he smoked a badly needed cigarette and waited.

He had not long to wait. Someone appeared at the door of the cellar and ordered him and the one man still remaining into the back parlor for instructions.

Those next few minutes were pure torture. Steve remembered that the parlor was softly and seductively lighted, but what were his chances of passing before Viki unrecognized? He pulled the peak of his cap down over his eyes and sent up a silent prayer to heaven.

As luck would have it Steve and his companion were the last of the fake guards to be sent into the aerodrome. It was nearly three o'clock and Viki was terse and impatient.

Steve kept in the shadow and averted his face while she briskly ordered his companion to proceed through the *café,* to cross the street and pass the sentry. Tonight's password was, she explained, "The wings will fly." To each she handed a revolver.

Unable to believe his good luck, Steve followed on his companion's heels. He did not hear Viki's light laugh as he left the room. Nor had he, in his care to remain inconspicuous, noticed the small man to whom Viki now turned.

"I don't think we need worry any further about our friend Steve Brabazon," she remarked to Herr Schmidt. "At least he's no longer at large. He was the tall man who just went out."

CHAPTER XI

KNIGHT WITHOUT AIMS

STEVE glanced round the public part of the *café* as he walked through it. In spite of the late hour there was still a handful of people there—the pretty barmaids, a few workmen, a woman in a shawl, hunched drunkenly over a glass of brandy. Plainly they had nothing to do with Plan G. But they helped unconsciously to give the place an aboveboard appearance.

Entering the gate of the aerodrome was simplicity itself. Their uniforms, the password, and above all the fact that one of the sentries happened to be Pedro Sandoz permitted them to pass without challenge.

Sandoz, obviously, had supplied tonight's password, and also a plan of the grounds; for Steve's companion walked as though he knew where he was going. He was a grim-faced young man, intelligent in fea-

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tures, and his mind was clearly occupied with such high thoughts as the future of his country. He paid no attention to Steve.

They reached a low concrete building in the center of the grounds, entered by a narrow flight of stone steps which lead downward. It was the underground control room, from which the pilotless seaplanes were guided by radio. It was closely guarded, but Steve guessed that the guards must all have been replaced by Viki's men. He dared not take the chance of addressing them.

Just as he entered the control room, Steve heard the roar of engines from the little bay beyond. From the sound he calculated that at least a dozen seaplanes must be taking off. His scowl of thoughtfulness deepened.

The control room was brightly illuminated, and it took Steve a second or two to accustom his eyes to the light. Knowing little about electrical matters, he was not a great deal wiser when he had. He gained an impression of a low vaulted room with a dozen panels containing intricate apparatus, dials, ammeters, high tension coils and a hundred other instruments whose nature he did not understand.

There were half a dozen uniformed men in the room. Two or three he recognized from the Café Conquistador. Chattering and curiously examining the electrical paraphernalia they were fortunately too busy to waste time on him.

In one corner of the room Steve saw a sight which was only too easy to understand. In that corner two huge high tension coils stood on immense insulating bases. Above them there was a notice: *Danger of Death.* And between them two men lay rigid in death. They were the two Valparadisan officers who had been on duty when Schmidt's men arrived.

Steve withdrew his gaze with a shudder.

At that moment Schmidt came into the room. He entered quietly, glanced around without particular interest, and politely removed his hat. He was still wearing his neat but shabby blue serge suit.

Even in this moment he reminded Steve of the second-rate commercial traveler he pretended to be. But every man in the room had stiffened to attention. His presence was like a faint, exhilarating electric shock.

Steve had already taken up an inconspicuous position in the background, half hidden by a softly throbbing dynamo. He was certain that Schmidt's brief, almost bored, inspection of the room had passed him by unnoticed.

And yet the man's very air of careless indifference brought cold beads of perspiration to Steve's forehead. There was something fiendishly inhuman about Schmidt's lack of emotion.

HIS voice had the same quality—a level tonelessness which was somehow a thousand times more terrifying than the passionate outbursts of his Nazi leaders in Germany. In spite of its monotony you could hear a pin drop when he spoke.

"Gentlemen," he began, "you will be curious to know exactly what Plan G is. Permit me to explain."

He walked over to the control board, pointing out the instruments with the stump of his cigar as he continued.

"You will have just heard a squadron of fifteen seaplanes taking off. The sound of their departure will cause no curiosity, because the authorities had planned for them to do so at precisely three A.M. They are heading for a harmless target of protruding rocks about one hundred miles south of here. Let me show you."

He clicked a switch in the control board. On the wall above the board a ground glass map of the sea became suddenly illuminated. A tiny dark speck crawled like a fly across the map, moving due south. Schmidt pointed it out.

"That moving speck," he explained, "shows the exact moment-by-moment position of the seaplanes. Each plane is loaded with high explosive bombs. This lever"—he touched a knife switch on the control board—"will release those bombs whenever I care to pull it down. The Valparadisan plan was to pull down this switch when

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the planes had reached these uninhabited rocks which you see on the map jutting out of the sea. The flight was to be merely a test flight. Our plan—Plan G—is slightly different. I will demonstrate."

Steve could almost hear the men holding their breath as Schmidt leaned over the dials on the control board. Steve's glance moved from Schmidt to the illuminated map above. What he saw sent a thrill of horrified comprehension through him. For the direction of the crawling speck had suddenly altered.

The 'planes were no longer making toward the target of uninhabited rocks. They were speeding through the night at over three hundred miles an hour toward the populous Gran Frijolian city of Rosa Grande.

"I daresay you have already grasped the crux of Plan G." Schmidt straightened from the controls. "The planes, as you see, can be guided by this ingenious little dial wherever I wish to guide them. You will observe that they are now making for Rosa Grande. They will be over that city in about fifteen minutes. I shall then pull down the lever which releases their cargo of destruction. Rosa Grande will be wiped out. And thus, gentlemen, Valparadisan planes will have barbarously attacked neutral Gran Frijole without provocation or warning."

He spoke as though he were discussing a brand of Swiss cheese for which he had little enthusiasm. He continued without alteration of voice.

"The first bomb that drops on Rosa Grande will be Señor Bulbo's signal to send up his famous Black Squadron. He will bomb San Utopia and Porreales—a just retaliation for Valparadiso's brutal attack on Gran Frijole."

For the first time something like a smile relieved Schmidt's features. But the phenomenon was fleeting. "By tomorrow morning, gentlemen, Gran Frijole will be at war with Valparadiso whether she wants to or not."

He relighted the stump of his cigar and, as though exhausted by the effort of making quite such a long speech, sat down.

AS THE full implications of Plan G sank in, an excitable murmur of appreciation broke spontaneously from Schmidt's listeners—a contrast to Schmidt's own imperturbability.

Even Steve had to admire the daring simplicity of it. Fantastic as it was, Plan G was diabolically sound. Steve struggled against a sense of unreality, born of the theatrical setting of this nightmare vaulted room where a simple lever could cause death and destruction a hundred miles away. Grimly he reminded himself that in ten minutes the million innocent people of Rosa Grande would awake to a scene of ghastly carnage.

If only he could get at that lever, jerk it down and release those bombs while the planes were still speeding harmlessly over the sea!

He grasped his revolver and stepped softly from behind the dynamo. He had nearly reached Schmidt's back before he was noticed. Schmidt himself was the first to see him. Even as he glanced around into the muzzle of Steve's gun he maintained his air of complete indifference.

"Your revolver, Mr. Brabazon, is not loaded," he explained quietly.

It was an old device, and Steve ignored it. "If any one of you moves," Steve, equally quiet, said, "I'll blow Herr Schmidt's brains out."

The men hesitated. Well disciplined, they awaited orders from their boss. Herr Schmidt nodded briefly, and six men leaped forward. Steve's finger tightened on the trigger. There was a click, but no report. Herr Schmidt had not been bluffing. Viki must have recognized him after all; she had supplied him with an unloaded gun.

CHAPTER XII

PLAN N. S. G.

STEVE hurled the useless weapon into the face of his nearest assailant and dived for the control board. But the move-

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ment had been anticipated. Someone tackled his legs, two more piled on top of him. The struggle was brief and futile. They had him trussed up before he was started.

Steve found himself staring into a grim and vicious row of faces, in which he read no signs of mercy. He had blacked the eyes of two or three of these men last night in the Café Conquistador and he could see them mentally weighing the most appropriate and painful way of avenging themselves. One suggested beating him unconscious, another thrusting lighted matches under his fingernails. In fact each had his own bright idea.

Herr Schmidt decided it. "You must understand, Mr. Brabazon," he said almost apologetically, "that I personally take no pleasure in such cheap emotionalism as revenge. To me the method by which you are killed is of no interest. But my friends bear you a grudge. They must have their fun. Try to forgive them."

He gave brisk orders in German and Steve was carried over towards the high tension coils where the two Valparadisan officers had already been electrocuted. But for Steve, Schmidt's ingenious brain had devised a more interesting form of electrocution.

The current was switched off and Steve was unbound. A metal bar stretched between the two coils. Steve was made to grasp this bar and advised so to support his weight that his feet would not touch the copper floor below.

Then the current was switched on again and Steve understood the point of Schmidt's advice. For if his feet so much as brushed the floor below his body would complete an electric circuit and he would be instantly electrocuted.

STEVE was tall, and only by doubling up his legs under him could he avoid completing this fatal circuit. But eventually he must tire, and at the moment his arms refused longer to support him he must die.

The scheme was voted admirable, combining as it did physical discomfort with mental torture.

But Steve's mental torture was of two kinds. For while he clung with mechanical tenacity to the bar which kept him only a few inches away from inevitable death his eyes were fixed on the illuminated map above the control board.

With fascinated horror he watched the moving speck draw nearer the sleeping city of Rosa Grande. In five minutes now stark death would rain down from the sky. The sight held him rigid so that he scarcely noticed the growing strain on his arms. His own end would follow later when his cramped muscles should relax their grip.

Four minutes now would bring the 'planes over Rosa Grande. The moving speck was already crossing the bay. Three minutes. . . . Steve saw Schmidt crouch over the controls, his fingers toying with the bomb-lever. . . . Two minutes. . . .

Then a slight diversion distracted the room's attention. This was the sudden appearance of Viki Lamarr at the door. Daringly dressed, her hair, the color of pale honey, fell in loose waves to her shoulders. The challenging scarlet bow of her mouth made men even in that tense moment catch their breath.

Her movements were slow and voluptuous as she stepped forward. Staring at her Steve's heart gave a leap. During the fraction of a second he, like everybody else in the room, had forgotten something. For this was the way Viki Lamarr looked normally—before she had become Maria!

Even Herr Schmidt had not yet grasped that startling fact. He turned to her, momentarily puzzled. The moment was enough. For the woman had thrown off her air of languor. An automatic had appeared in her small right hand.

THE gun spoke. Herr Schmidt clutched his left shoulder and stumbled. The others—accustomed to taking orders from Viki—could only stare in dumb bewilderment.

But Steve knew only one woman who could shoot like that—Judy! And he saw,

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in spite of the amazing transformation, that it was Judy.

She had reached his side before the others grasped what was happening. Still helplessly dangling Steve jerked out instructions about the switch which controlled the current in the high tension coils.

Judy obeyed him swiftly and Steve leaped to the floor. Even yet Herr Schmidt's men held back, stupefied. Then Herr Schmidt found his voice.

"Shoot her, you fools!" he shouted. She's a fake."

The first man who sought to obey Herr Schmidt's orders felt something like a one-ton high explosive bomb drop on him. It was Steve. The man fell, and when later he got up again it was with the assistance of two stretcher bearers.

The second would-be assassin was even less fortunate. A split second before he fired another report sounded from the door behind him. He threw out his arms, spun half around, and pitched forward. He had been shot through the head.

Then the room was suddenly full of people. Men in Valparadisan Air Force uniform, only in this case they happened to be Valparadisans. The report of Judy's gun had brought them from all sides.

But Herr Schmidt had groped feebly from the floor. Steve saw his hand clutch at the bomb lever. Steve had reached him before his fingers found the switch. The rest was a matter of seconds. A Valparadisan officer had also reached the control board.

While Herr Schmidt and his pals were being rounded up Steve saw by the illuminated map that the seaplanes were already on their return journey. Gran Frijole observers debated for weeks the identity of the squadron of seaplanes which circled over the Bay of Rosa Grande that night.

IT WAS dawn before Señor Bulbo finally went to bed. He had been on the 'phone twenty times to Rosa Grande, only to learn that the city lay serenely and securely asleep under the bright, peaceful stars. He resented it. As an accomplice to a treasonable plot which hadn't come off, Señor Bulbo's teeth were chattering as he locked himself into his bedroom. His subsequent court martial proved that his present fears were only too well founded.

In a room in the Wilhelmstrasse near the German Foreign Office Herr Heinrich Himmler also spent a sleepless night. While waiting he distracted himself by making out a long list of personal acquaintances to be sent to concentration camps. But even this congenial task did not restore his good humor.

It was nearly dawn when Steve and Judy re-entered the Café del Rey. By an overwhelming vote they had decided on a drink. Having talked themselves hoarse, they needed one. Judy had had plenty of explaining to do.

Briefly it came to this. Her visit to the hairdresser this afternoon had been in the nature of a joke. She wanted to prove to Steve that she could transform herself into a glamorous blonde. But the turban hat she had worn all day had hidden her newly bleached hair.

Then this evening, resenting the fact that Steve was pushing her off to bed, she had returned to the Café del Rey on her own. Her disguise had been simple—the voluminous cloak of an old peasant woman. She was, in fact, the drunken hag Steve had noticed hunched over a glass in one corner of the room.

Keeping in mind the fact that Maria might be Viki, Judy's senses had remained extraordinarily alert. She watched Maria come from the back parlor with Schmidt shortly after Steve had crossed to the aerodrome. More important, she caught a phrase or two of their conversation which told her Steve's goose was cooked.

Therefore, when Herr Schmidt had left the *café* and proceeded towards the aerodrome Judy had taken the law into her own hands.

She had taken the law into her own hands with unladylike enthusiasm. In fact Viki Lamarr was just recovering as Steve and Judy re-entered the *café*. She was

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picking herself up a little dazedly from behind the counter of the bar, and rubbing her head where something heavy had hit her.

She regarded the cheerful Steve and Judy without her usual winning smile.

"You might bring us the whisky bottle," Steve suggested pleasantly.

Viki obeyed sullenly.

"Can you imagine her in a Valparadisan jail?" Steve said. "She'd have her jailers corrupted in ten minutes."

Judy conceded the point. "Perhaps they'll shoot her," she pointed out hopefully.

At that moment a disheveled man rushed breathlessly into the *café*. Not having the taxi fare, Don Aldo Francesco del Ortini had covered the distance between San Utopia and Calle del Cielo on foot. His voice was agitated as he addressed Viki.

"Say!" he panted. "They got away from me! They bumped me on the head and locked me in a room, bound and gagged. Wait till I catch that Brabazon guy!"

Viki nodded toward the corner table where Steve and Judy were settling down with the whisky bottle. Don Aldo followed her glance, turned slightly green and gulped. Then, being basically a man of good sense, he scrambled for the door.

"Excuse me, folks," he murmured.

The argument about what to do with Viki continued. It continued so long in fact that Viki tactfully left them to it. Steve heard her descending the rocky footpath behind the *café*. He wondered how far she would get. But after all, Viki Lamarr had always been a little girl who knew how to take care of herself.

Judy slipped her hand into Steve's.

"Let's start our honeymoon all over again," she murmured.

Steve returned the warm pressure of her hand. "What about Rio?" he suggested. "I hear they're opening up the casino again."

THE END

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LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS

SERVED IN BOTH ARMIES BLUE *and* GRAY

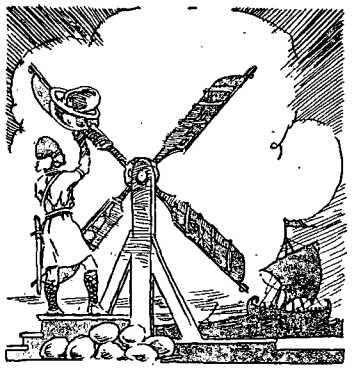
Adam Oliver of the Ordnance Dept., Union army, was captured by the Confederates, and made to continue his regular duty as armorer. Later he was rescued by his own forces, and stayed at his post without interruption.

◦ CAPTAIN ◦

This word is derived from "Caput" the head or chief Thane of a Saxon tribe. Thanes were noblemen, as opposed to "Churls" or commoners.

◦ MARRIAGE OF STATE ◦

The custom of placing relatives upon foreign thrones (through marriage) to secure political advantages was initiated in Europe by Theodoric the Goth, after he conquered Italy. The practise is continued to this day.



◦ MEDIEVAL NAVAL GUN ◦

One stone-thrower used afloat during the Middle Ages, was a strange machine which worked on the principle of a windmill, and with the same motive power.

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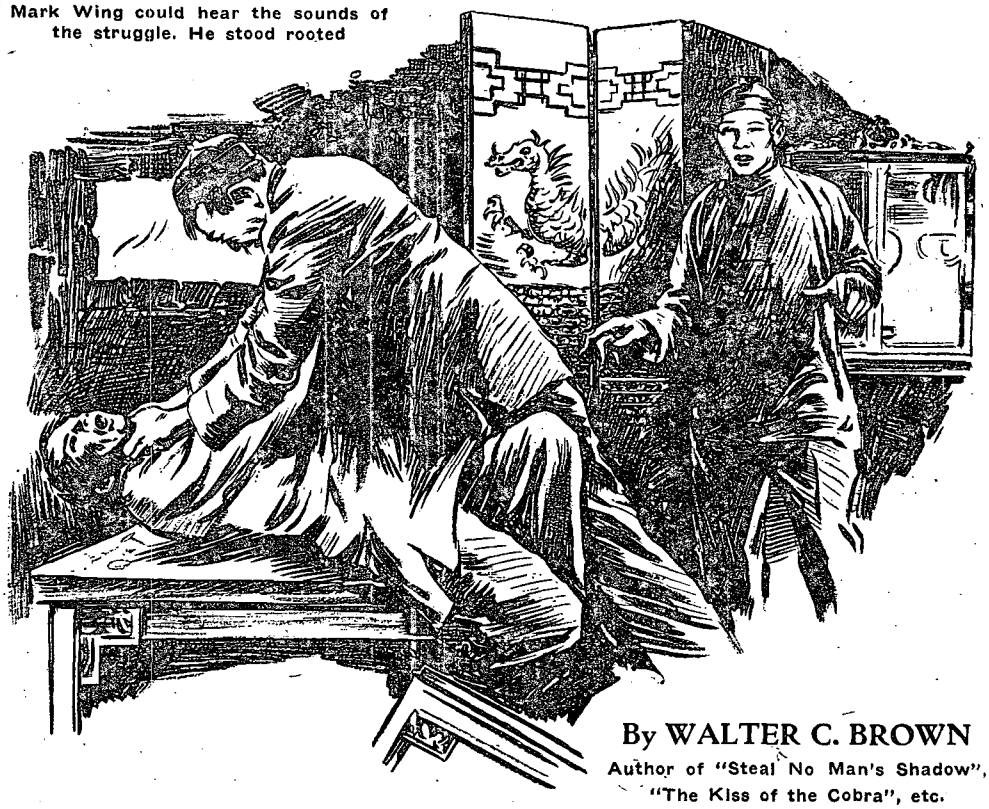

Mark Wing could hear the sounds of the struggle. He stood rooted

By WALTER C. BROWN

Author of "Steal No Man's Shadow", "The Kiss of the Cobra", etc.

Black Candles

Sergeant O'Hara was delighted that for once he had a witness to a Chinatown murder, until he learned that his witness was a blind man. But the sergeant needn't have worried . . .

MARK WING and his brother, Lee Wing, had acquired a certain measure of fame even before the strange case of the Black Candles sent shivering whispers through the crooked streets of Chinatown. Lee, the elder brother, was a goldsmith of high repute, and Mark, despite his blindness, was known far and wide for his skillful carvings in ivory and jade.

The White Devils who came to Chinatown on the "look-see" bus often lingered in the brothers' shop on Pagoda Street to watch Mark shape and carve a piece of jade and some doubted he was really blind until he raised his head and they saw how the light had gone from his eyes.

And yet it was blind Mark Wing who solved the mystery of the Black Candles, after even Sergeant O'Hara of the Chinatown Squad had been baffled by the technique of the silent killer.

Sergeant O'Hara knew as much about the devious ways of the Yellow Quarter as any police *shih* can hope to learn, but no white man can be expected to know that the black joss burned in honor of Yo Fei, dread Lord of Murder and Sudden Death, has a peculiar scent, differing from all other joss.

But Mark Wing did not miss this vital

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point, for one who walks through a world of eternal blackness sharpens his other senses to the keenness of a razor's edge.

The Black Candles of Murder were lit on the day Lee Wing's artistry as a goldsmith was to be rewarded with a Number One honor. Four fine Burma rubies, the legacy of a rich silk merchant recently deceased, were to be added to the already gem-studded Ceremonial Bowl of the great Suey Sing Tong, and Lee Wing had been chosen to do the mountings.

As the appointed hour drew nearer, Lee became more and more nervous and restless. Finally he opened a little lacquer cabinet and took out a pearl-handled revolver and a Manchu dagger, balancing them in his hands, as if making a choice.

"It is said a goodly weapon in hand will strengthen a man's courage better than the deepest draught of tiger's blood," the goldsmith murmured. "Aye, if it be truth, I will make myself doubly strong for this day of days."

Whereupon he thrust the revolver into his girdle of red silk and sheathed the long dagger in Oriental style under the back collar of his robe, so that its hilt stuck out behind his right ear.

Then he went to the door of the shop and looked warily along Pagoda Street, where twilight was gathering in a rising tide of sullen purple. He drew back with a startled jerk as his glance fell upon a blue-clad Oriental who lounged within arm's reach of the white stone steps.

"Have no fears, Lee Wing," the loiterer whispered to him. "The brothers of the Suey Sing keep watch everywhere— Behold!"

The tong member took a long-stemmed bamboo pipe from his lips and tapped the brass bowl against the stone. Halfway down the street another blue-robed figure stirred in a shadowy doorway and answered the clicking signal with a similar gesture.

"The Sacred Bowl will arrive with safety," the man declared with a slant-eyed smile, "for we stand guard over it every foot of the way from the Suey Sing House on Mulberry Lane to this very door."

"Wah!" Lee Wing breathed a long sigh of relief and went inside again, but he drew the bolts on the shop door. Then, as the Canton water clock beside the stairs struck its liquid chime, Lee hastened toward the work-room behind the shop, from which came the singsong droning of a voice.

The voice belonged to Tai Yat, his brother's Number One friend, who came there for an hour or so almost every day to discuss the latest war bulletins from the Land of the Dragon, or read aloud to the blind man from the Five Classics.

"Brother Mark, it is the Hour of the Rooster," Lee announced, and added in a significant tone, "I have already closed and locked our door, so that no late-comers may disturb us at our work."

Mark Wing nodded, lifting his blank eyes from the jade *choy* he was carving. "We must make an end to the reading, Tai Yat, for my brother awaits the illustrious *tuchun,* Kim Hoy, about a piece of business which may not be spoken of."

"I take my leave from thy gracious presence with reluctant haste," Tai Yat replied, closing the ancient volume and rising.

Mark Wing rose also, and grasping a blackwood cane with which he guided his steps, accompanied his friend through the back door and across the high-walled little garden to the *hutung* gate.

"Gracious thanks for an hour made pleasant by thy voice, Tai Yat," Mark said politely, and his friend replied, "The Three Blessings upon thy roof."

MARK WING closed the garden gate and dropped the wooden bar into place, lingering for a moment to breathe in the pungent aroma of marigold blossoms and listen to the kuroo-kuroo of the gypsy pigeons who had lately taken up quarters along the roofs.

"Did you lock the gate and the back door behind you, brother?" Lee Wing demanded sharply as soon as Mark returned to the workroom.

"Aye!" Mark replied. "Calm thyself, Brother Lee. Thou art restless as one who awaits the birth of his first son."

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"The Bowl of the Suey Sings is precious beyond price," Lee answered. "I wish you had not spoken of Kim Hoy before your friend. If a hint should reach the ears of the Tsin Tien Tong—"

"Tai Yat is my friend," Mark said, simply. "He will keep his tongue behind his teeth."

"What man can answer for another's tongue?" Lee retorted. "If any mishap befall the Bowl while it is in my care there would be naught for me but to tighten a length of red silk cord about my neck and journey into the Shadow-Land."

"Have we not strong bars upon the windows, and double bolts on every door?" Mark queried, then broke into a chuckle. "Fear nothing, brother. If the men of the Tsin Tien break into the house, I will send them running with my black stick."

Calm and placid, Mark Wing continued his work, while the nervous Lee made yet another tour of the doors and windows, testing the heavy bolts and bars which had been added after a robbery some time before.

As the blind man plied his gravers' tools, he heard the click and fall of his brother's ivory prayer-blocks, as Lee sought for an omen from the Lords of Chance.

"Nothing! Again they tell me nothing!" Lee muttered. "The Sign of Water! The Lords of the Upper Realm are pleased to jest with me."

"Not so, brother," Mark replied, laughing. "It will rain very soon now. In fact, I hear the first drops at this moment."

"You are mistaken," Lee said. "It is only the dripping of our water-clock."

But seeing Mark's confident smile, he raised a window and thrust his hand into the darkness beyond the bars. It was indeed raining, but so softly and quietly that Lee marveled at the exceeding sharpness of his brother's hearing.

"Kim Hoy is late," he said impatiently, closing the window and pacing to and fro. "Why does he not come at the agreed hour?"

"Perhaps they wait for the rain to cease," Mark suggested.

The rain had suddenly come on in earnest, beating and slashing against the panes. Mark listened to the riotous gurgling of their rain-spout and the muted *kuroo*-ing of the pigeons, driven to shelter under eaves and cornices.

Then came four sharp raps at the shop door, followed by another set of four, and Lee Wing hurried to unfasten the bolts at the appointed signal.

Two yellow men entered quickly, raindrops hanging like crystal beads from the brims of their round black hats. One was sharp-eyed Kim Hoy, Master of the Suey Sings, and the other was Yuan Shu, famed tong fighter, a proud, haughty man with rat-tail moustaches.

"Ala wah, tuchun!" Lee Wing bowed, touching Kim Hoy's hand to his forehead as a token of respect. "All is in readiness, Master."

Kim Hoy made a brisk gesture to Captain Yuan, who threw back the gleaming folds of his black rain-cape and brought forth something round and bulky, wrapped in a length of lustrous apricot silk.

"Behold! The Great Bowl of the *Ti Joy* Feast!" Kim Hoy said, whisking off the silken coverlet, and they made a kowtow before the ritual vessel of the Suey Sings, adding a mystic sign with the fingers of the left hand.

Mark Wing heard his brother's breath catch in wordless tribute to its shimmering beauty; its curved bowl of flawless *fei-tsui* jade, set in a richly carved base of teakwood inlaid with gold *kylins* and studded with precious stones.

Then Kim Hoy took out a little silver box and revealed the Burma rubies, nested in soft white cotton, like four red eyes blinking with liquid fire.

"Let these blood-stones be added to the Sacred Bowl with such skill that no man's eye can tell the new mountings from the old," the *tuchun* ordered. "You may work without haste, Lee Wing, for there is naught to fear. Captain Yuan and his men stand guard at both ends of the street. At what hour shall we return for the completed work?"

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"The Bowl shall be ready and waiting before high noon," Lee promised.

"*Wah!* We shall call upon you, then, promptly at the Hour of the Rat. And do not open thy door to any one unless he first give the secret knock of double-four."

"Have no fear of that, *tuchun!*" Lee Wing declared with fervor, and bolted the door so promptly behind his visitors that he struck the departing heels of Yuan Shu.

When Lee returned to the workroom his blind brother was running long, sensitive fingers over the intricate carving of the Suey Sing Bowl.

"It is beautiful," Mark murmured, and added wistfully, "Tonight I wish for my eyes again."

"Aye," Lee replied softly. "Never have I seen such splendor of line and richness of color. Here are stones which gleam with the blue of the sky and the green of the sea and the redness of fire. Ai-yee, brother, in your hands you hold the ransom of an emperor."

"It is work of the Hsung-hsi Period," Mark declared, his thin yellow fingers still caressing and exploring the beauties of the Bowl.

"Hola! It is indeed Hsung-hsi!" Lee exclaimed. "By Tao, thy cunning hands are a match for my two eyes! But let us set to work, Brother Mark!"

LEE WING prepared the portable forge and placed a porcelain cup filled with gold in the center of a block of glowing charcoal. Mark took up his post beside it, rousing the fire to a ruby glare with a pair of leather hand-bellows.

And as the goldsmith moved to and fro, gathering his tools, he spoke of the history of the Suey Sing Bowl, how it was used only once each year, at the sacred feast of *Ti Joy*.

"At all other times," Lee said, "it is kept hidden away in an iron-doored closet with five separate locks, so that it may be opened only when the five members of the Suey Sing Council are gathered together, each bringing his special key—"

"Hssst!" Mark Wing warned suddenly, halting the rhythm of his bellows. "Silence! I heard a noise!"

Lee froze into startled immobility at his words, his fingers curling over the pearl-handled revolver, his ears strained against the steady drumming of the rain outside. Then he, too, heard it—a flapping and fluttering that seemed to circle above the house.

"It is the pigeons flying about on the roof," Lee said, with a nervous laugh of relief. "Heugh! Thy words made my heart pound like a war drum."

"What I heard was not the sound of wings," Mark declared, lifting his blind eyes and cocking his head a little to one side. "It may be nothing more than the night-spirits which dwell in the walls of an old house, brother, but go and look about once more."

"*Wah!*" Lee replied, passing into the shop, where he tested the bolts on the front door. Then he moved on into the back regions, his felt-soled slippers making a soft pad-pad along the hall and past the stairs.

Mark began to ply the bellows again, so that an even heat would be maintained under the melting gold in the cup, but now he worked the wooden handles more quietly, his ears still alert.

Suddenly a small sound made him stiffen into rigidity—a faint clashing from the beaded curtains at the doorway. Some one had just entered the room.

Standing utterly still, the blind man's straining ears caught the rustle of furtive movement, the faint sound of a cautious breathing. His flaring nostrils caught the scent of clothing dampened by rain. A moment later his last doubt vanished when a floor-board creaked with a sharp *squee-op*.

His first thought for the safety of the Suey Sing Bowl, Mark dropped the bellows and made a blind lunge toward the work-table. His arm swept out in a hooking curve, brushing across the table, but it encountered nothing. Emptiness! Bare

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boards! The Ceremonial Bowl had vanished!'

"Lee! Lee! Come quickly!" he screamed, panic-stricken at the terrible discovery.

Lee Wing's padded steps came racing along the hall and into the room. "What is it, brother?" he panted breathlessly. "Wherefore this outcry—*Ai-yee!* The Bowl! Where is the Bowl?"

"It is gone! Stolen!" Mark replied frantically. "There is a thief in the house! I heard him!"

"A thief!" Lee's wail of anguish shot up like a rocket. "But how can this be, brother? When you cried out, I turned back at once, and I saw no one—no one!"

"Then he is still here; here in this room!" Mark exclaimed.

Through the blind man's brain raced a swift picture of the details of that room. There was a long table, the forge, the two work-benches, two cabinets, a devil-screen—

"Beware, Lee!" he cried out. "The devil-screen!"

Mark Wing's warning came too late. Even as his voice rang out there was a sudden flurry of movement. He heard Lee's strangled gasp and then, suddenly, the thud of a heavy fall to the floor.

"Lee!" Mark called out in alarm.

There was no reply.

The blind man snatched at the rack above his bench, groping hurriedly for the keen-edged knives he used in his work. Grasping as many as he could manage, he whirled and sent one of the sharp blades flashing through the air.

It ripped into the opposite wall and hung there, swaying, but a frightened gasp told Mark Wing that he had missed his invisible foe by only a narrow margin.

Sudden silence fell upon the room—an abysmal silence of held breath and straining nerves and taut muscles. The blind man knew that his unseen enemy had taken shelter behind the devil-screen; that he could not make a start for the doorway without first pushing the heavy screen aside.

And Mark Wing waited for that scraping sound which must come, standing straight and still, a knife poised for the throw, grimly determined that the thief should not escape.

He fought down the overpowering temptation to cry out for help, knowing that under cover of the noise his cornered foe would dash for the door—and freedom. Silence—utter silence was the blind man's best weapon.

"Hear me, O Father Milo!" his spirit groaned within him. "If I could but have my eyes for one minute—one minute only!"

There was the sound at last; the scraping sound. Mark Wing flung the knife, but it ricocheted from the screen and flew across the room. Mark threw again, and heard the blade bite deep into the lacquered panels.

Strangely, though, the scraping sound seemed to be moving nearer. Suddenly the blind man realized that his enemy was advancing upon him, using the screen as a shield against his flying steel.

Clutching the last knife firmly in his hand, Mark Wing charged. He crashed headlong into the screen, which was part of his plan, for in the toppling fall he hoped to come to grips with the thief.

He reached . . .

His outflung hand found a bit of cloth —the collar of a *shaam*—and his fingers closed on the flesh above it, fingers made strong as steel pincers by the craft he followed.

The thief gave a choking snarl under the pitiless pressure, but Mark Wing could not hold his advantage. A knee came up and struck him in the stomach, so that he cried out and loosened his grip. Then a stunning blow caught him above the ear, knocking him aside.

The blind man raised himself to his knees in darkness that raced like a spinning top. With the last remnant of ebbing strength he struck with his knife and felt the blade drive harmlessly into the wooden floor.

A second blow fell. With a deep groan Mark Wing pitched forward on his face.

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THE persistence of the staccato noise seeped at last into Mark Wing's dazed brain, so that he stirred and rolled over slightly. Then memory returned with a jolt, and with it, pain. Mark put his hands to his throbbing head and groaned.

The noise came from the street door; an impatient hammering with fist and foot. Someone seized the door handle and shook it so furiously that the glass panels rattled and shivered.

Mark dragged himself upright and staggered forward, swaying like one who has swallowed too much *samshu*. But Lee Wing's body lay across his path, and he stumbled and fell headlong over it.

He crouched there, groping for his brother's face. *"Ai-yee!"* he moaned, for the flesh was already stiff and cold to the touch. Still half dazed, Mark regained his feet and lurched toward the door, crashing into this thing and that in his blind haste.

It was Kim Hoy and Yuan Shu who waited on the stone steps outside, with the tong guard crowding behind them.

"Hai!" Kim Hoy grumbled as the door swung open at last. "Is this a House of the Dead, that no one answers to our knocking —Hola! There is blood upon thy head, Mark Wing! What means this?"

"A night-thief, *tuchun!*" Mark gasped. "I fought as best I could, but I could not ward off his blows."

"A thief!" Kim Hoy's voice rose in an instant screech of alarm. "Did you say *thief?*"

"*Tuchun,* my spirit is crushed under a mountain of sorrow," Mark stammered, holding to the lintel of the door. *"Ai-yee!* My brother Lee lies dead, and the Great Bowl of the Suey Sings is stolen! Come within and see for yourselves, you who have eyes!"

For a moment there was stunned silence, then the Suey Sings burst into a shrill babel: swarming into the shop with Captain Yuan Shu in the lead. He plucked a crooked knife from under his black cape as he went.

From room to room they swept in frantic search, pulling the furniture about, banging doors, racing up and down stairs, and raising such a hubbub that they did not hear the siren of the red prowl car as it dashed into Pagoda Street, bringing Sergeant O'Hara and Officer Burke to the scene.

"What's all this racket?" O'Hara demanded in a loud voice, striding into the midst of the uproar. "What goes on here?"

The men of the Suey Sing drew back at his approach, and O'Hara saw the body of Lee Wing. Swiftly he bent on one knee to examine the crushed skull.

"Is he dead, Sergeant?" Burke asked.

"Dead as mutton," O'Hara answered grimly. "It looks like a hammer job to me." He stood up, his inquisitorial eye taking stock of the circle of slant-eyed yellow faces. "Well, how'd it happen? Speak up!"

They spoke up: Mark Wing, Kim Hoy and Yuan Shu, in a crackling flood of singsong. O'Hara learned about the Suey Sing Bowl and the four Burma rubies which had been stolen, and how Lee Wing had met his death, and how his blind brother had fought a valiant duel with the killer-thief.

"What a break!" Officer Burke grumbled. "We get our hands on a witness to a Chinatown murder, and it's gotta be a blind man!"

"Stop growlin', Burke, and get busy!" O'Hara ordered. "Take a look-see at the doors and windows while I try to locate the weapon."

But O'Hara didn't find the blunt instrument of Lee Wing's death, and Burke could find no evidence of any one having broken into the shop. "Bolts and bars everywhere," he reported. "The place is built like a fort."

O'Hara nodded. "Just like I thought, Burke. This is an inside job. The killer didn't break in. I figure he was hiding here ahead of time, waiting for the Bowl to arrive."

"Yeah, but how'd he get away?" Burke queried. "Everything's still locked up."

"He escaped through the back door," O'Hara replied. "Yuan Shu told me he found it open when the Suey Sings rushed in. He locked it again, just to be safe while they were searchin' the house. But get this point, Burke; the killer didn't open his mouth, not once, all the time he was doin'

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the job. Why? Because Mark Wing woulda recognized him by his voice!"

"You're right, Sergeant," Burke agreed. "It's inside stuff."

O'Hara turned to the tong *tuchun*. "Kim Hoy, how many Suey Sings knew that the Bowl was to be brought here to Lee Wing's shop?"

"Only the Council of Five know that secret fact, Sah-jin—and Lee Wing, who is now with his honorable ancestors."

"Hm!" O'Hara swung around to the blind man. "How about it, Mark? Did your brother tell any one about this Bowl? Or did you?"

"I tell Tai Yat that Kim Hoy come here tonight on hidden matter," Mark replied, "but I do not speak the name of the Suey Sing Bowl."

"Tai Yat!" The exclamation came from Yuan Shu, followed by a harsh laugh. "Tai Yat belong to the Tsin Tien Tong, which is long-time enemy of the Suey Sing. Hoya! It is plain as a candle in a dark room!"

"You speak with hasty tongue!" Mark Wing replied angrily. "How can Tai Yat steal the Suey Sing Bowl when he has left long before Kim Hoy bring it? I myself go with him to the garden gate, and lock it with my own hand behind him."

"Yeah?" O'Hara said, frowning. "Well, maybe Tai Yat pulled a fast one on you. How do you know he left, Mark? You couldn't see him. He might've said goodbye, then sneaked around behind you and got back into the house while you were lockin' the gate."

"Tai Yat is not thief!" Mark declared stubbornly. "Tai Yat is my Number One friend!"

"Okay, okay," O'Hara said, but he looked across at Burke and gave a brisk nod, whereupon the officer turned and left the room. O'Hara touched Mark's arm.

"You come along with us to the station, Mark, so you'll be on hand if anything more turns up . . . and I think it will."

MARK WING rode in the Black Wagon to the police *yamen*, and was lodged in a narrow room whose door was a web of iron bars. Presently a White Devil doctor arrived and proceeded to bandage his wounds with yards of bandage, so that his head seemed to be wearing a turban.

"Feel better now?" the doctor asked.

"My head is filled with pain-devils," Mark replied.

"You're lucky to be alive," the doctor assured him. "You must have a cast-iron skull."

The minutes ticked away into hours, but Mark Wing sat silent and motionless as a stone Buddha until a Blue Coat man with jingling keys unlocked the iron door and conducted him into Sergeant O'Hara's office.

"I've got news for you, Mark Wing," O'Hara said. "We've arrested the man who murdered your brother. Fast work, eh?"

"My ears ache for the sound of his thrice-accursed name!" Mark answered with hissing breath, his blind eyes staring, his yellow fingers taut on the blackwood cane.

"It was Tai Yat—your friend." O'Hara replied. "Hold on, now, don't start arguin' 'til you've heard the evidence we got. Here see if you recognize this."

Mark's fingers slid expertly over the small metal object O'Hara thrust into his hands.

"It is the silver box in which Kim Hoy brought the four blood-stones for the Suey Sing Bowl."

"Right!" O'Hara said. "And what is this?"

The blind man's fingers explored the contours of a second object.

"It is my brother Lee's wooden hammer for beating the gold-leaf into thin sheets."

"Well, that's the weapon killed your brother," O'Hara declared. "It's still stained and streaked with his blood, and with yours, too."

"But the hand that held it was not the hand of Tai Yat!" the blind man declared firmly. "Tai Yat did not steal the Suey Sing Bowl. He did not steal my brother's shadow. I swear it by the Triple Oath of Milo Fo!"

"Listen," O'Hara said patiently. "This

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box and the hammer was hidden in a broken chimney on the roof outside Tai Yat's window. All that rain soaked off the fingerprints, but we don't need 'em. We've got everything else."

"And the Suey Sing Bowl, Sah-jin?" Mark asked softly. "Did you find it hidden under Tai Yat's sleeping *k'ang?* Did you find the four blood-stones under Tai Yat's pillow?"

"It won't take us long to find out where he hid the stuff," O'Hara said confidently. "Naturally, Tai Yat wouldn't be dumb enough to hide the Bowl and the stones in his room. Give us a little time, we'll wear him down!"

"Sah-jin!" Mark Wing lifted his blind eyes. "If you bring Tai Yat before me in this room, I make proof that he is not thief."

"How?" O'Hara asked suspiciously. "You didn't see the murderer, and you told us he didn't make a sound, didn't speak a word."

"The blind learn to see without eyes," Mark replied.

O'Hara rubbed his jaw for a moment, then went to the door, calling into the Squad Room, "Bring Tai Yat in here, Burke."

Mark Wing turned his head with unerring instinct at the shuffling pad-pad of Tai Yat's footsteps, but he made no sign of greeting, turning to O'Hara.

"Sah-jin, it is true my dead eyes could not see the man who kill my brother Lee, but I have smell him! Hoya! His robe was wet with the rain, and three things I smell from it; tobacco, *samshu,* and the smoke of joss-stick! The Black Joss which burns to Yo Fei!"

The blind man stretched out his arm, groping around until his fingers closed on Tai Yat's robe. He bent his head to it, taking deep sniffs at the dark blue cloth.

"The three smells of my brother's killer are not upon Tai Yat's *shaam,* Sah-jin," he announced. "Tai Yat does not smoke the

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brown weed, he does not drink *samshu,* and he is Mission Chinaman who does not burn joss before the shrine of the Elder Gods."

"Yeah? That's very interesting, Wing," O'Hara said, 'but it's not what we call regular evidence. It'll take more than sniffin' and smellin' to break down the case against Tai Yat."

"I'll say it will!" Burke added in his booming voice. "It's been proved that Tai Yat knew Kim Hoy was coming to the shop, he was the last man on the scene, and he's a member of a rival tong. On top of that, we find the jewel box and the hammer. If that don't clinch it, I'll eat dirt!"

"Men have gone to the chair on less evidence, Mark," O'Hara said grimly. "If you think somebody else pulled this job, you'll have to give us something we can check on, something better than the smell of black joss. Meanwhile, your friend stays under lock and key. Okay, Burke, take him away."

"Hold fast to thy courage with both hands, Tai Yat!" the blind man cried after his departing friend. "I will labor night and day to destroy the shadow of evil which now rests upon you."

"Kan shieh!" Tai Yat replied. "Grateful thanks!"

THE morning sun was spilling gold over the roofs of Chinatown when a patrol car brought Mark Wing back to Pagoda Street. O'Hara had stationed a policeman on guard inside the shop, so that nothing might be taken from the premises during Mark's detention.

The driver climbed from the car and guided the blind man across the pavement and into the shop. "Are you all right now, Wing?" he asked kindly. "Anything we can do for you before we leave?"

"Nothing," Mark replied.

"Sergeant O'Hara asked me to give you this," the Blue Coat said. "It's a police whistle. If you run into any more trouble, open a window and blow it till help comes. The officer on the beat has orders to keep an eye on the place."

"Again humble thanks," Mark said, bowing politely as he thrust the silver whistle into his tunic.

He bolted the shop door and started on a slow tour of the silent house, tap-tapping his way with the black stick. The rooms had the hush of a tomb, except for the rhythmic dripping of the Canton water-clock, and the faint *kuroo-kuroo* of the gypsy pigeons on the roof.

His inspection completed, Mark Wing changed to his ceremonial robes and burned a packet of prayer paper before the smiling Kwan-Yin of their household shrine, that Lee his brother might have a speedy journey through the Corridors of Eternity and happy welcome to the august company of their ancestors.

Having finished these rites, the blind man brewed himself a pot of fragrant Soochow tea. Cross-legged he sat upon the floor, wrapped in brooding thought, paying no heed to any who came and rapped upon the door of the shop, seeking admittance.

"This is a sorrow with two shadows," Mark murmured, staring into his darkened world. "The deed of blood against my brother stands unavenged, and my friend stands in peril of his life from the police *shih,* who have eyes, and see not. . . . O, Father Milo, lend me of thy wisdom in this hour!"

Late in the afternoon he put on his street-robe and left the shop, tapping along the streets toward the Suey Sing House on Mulberry Lane.

"I would have speech with the Council of Five," he told the *mafu* who opened the door of the tong headquarters.

"Enter and rest thy bones, Man of Darkness," the *mafu* said. "The Slipper shall be sent forth at once to summon our Five Elders."

So the tong messenger departed on his quest, and soon the councillors began to arrive—the *tuchun* Kim Hoy, Captain Yuan Shu, Wang-lo the merchant, Gat Sing the banker, and Feng Lee the apothecary.

Mark Wing bowed with the Number One kowtow when he was ushered into the inner chamber.

"Honorable Council," he began, "the sor-

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rowful evils which have fallen upon the House of Wing are known to all. There is mourning, too, within the walls of the great Suey Sing, that their Sacred Bowl has been stolen from the hands of Lee Wing, my brother. It is the ancient law that a son shall pay his father's debt, and brother that of brother. With Tao's help, I shall pay my brother's reckoning to the Suey Sing."

The blind man paused, lifting his hand to silence the excited murmuring which had broken forth at his words.

"My brother had set by a store of savings, in gold and silver pieces. This much is known to me, but not the value of its reckoning, nor the secret place in which it lies hidden. But tonight I shall lock the doors and search for this treasure, and when I have found it, and made count of it, I will again come before you and we will discuss a price and payment for the Suey Sing bowl."

"Well spoken!" Kim Hoy exclaimed. "Thou art a true Son of Han! All thy honorable ancestors will give praise to each other over thy words, saying 'Here is one worthy indeed to bear the great name of Wing!' "

"It is but a deed of simple justice," Mark replied, bowed quickly and left them, for he was in haste to return to his shop.

HAD any one placed an ear against that locked door on Pagoda Street as twilight deepened, he would have heard the sound of hammer and saw, and marveled that a blind man could work with such quickness and precision.

The liquid chime of the Canton water clock announced the Hour of the Rooster, then the Hour of the Pig, before Mark Wing had finished. Panting from his exertions, he put away his tools and wiped the sweat from his glistening moon-face.

"Wah!" he breathed. "The spider's web is ready. Tao grant that it be strong enough to hold the fly!"

Mark started a fire in the little forge, and thrust a long soldering iron into the glowing bed of charcoal. His next move was to stop the time-measuring drip of the water-clock, for tonight he was risking his life on the sharpness of his ears.

Black stick in hand, he tapped his way up the dark stairs to the top floor. Silent, motionless, he waited there, while the Hour of the Pig gave place to the Hour of the Fox. The sounds of traffic lessened, and he heard the clatter of wooden shutters being fastened over shop windows.

Midnight spread its deep hush upon the silent houses of Pagoda Street, but Mark still waited, confident that Lee Wing's killer would rise to the moneyed bait he had spread about in his declaration before the Suey Sing Council—the lure of treasure to be wrested from a blind man, the blind man he had beaten once before.

Suddenly Mark Wing grew taut and tense, his hand seeking the curved knife which he had thrust into his girdle. The pigeons! With startled cries they rose in flight from their nooks and crannies along the roofs; the air was filled with the flapping beat of their wings.

Mark's memory flashed back to the hour of his brother's murder. Then, too, the pigeons had risen from their roosts and circled in the rain, but he had not recognized the sinister significance of their flight, had not realized that the birds took to the air because a black shadow crept silently across the roofs.

He caught his breath with a little hiss at the next sound; a faint crackling of the tin roof over his head. Footsteps, soft and stealthy, a mere rustling whisper. Then came a cautious, scraping noise against the outside wall—the sound a man might make as he slid warily down a length of swaying rope.

"Wah! He comes! He comes!" Mark whispered into the darkness, backing away through the hall, groping for the stair rail. Something brushed softly against the outside of the window frame as the blind man crept down the stairs, matching his foe in silent stealth.

As he reached the bottom, a sudden draught of cool air flowed down the staircase, and he knew that the window in the

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room above had been opened. A dark figure would be thrusting itself cautiously over the sill, padded slippers searching for the floor.

Swiftly Mark glided to the door of the workshop, entered and closed it, shooting the well oiled bolts noiselessly. It was a door of solid strength, backed with iron sheeting. There was no other opening to the room save a small square porthole which Lee Wing had built in the wall, so he could keep an eye on the shop door while he labored at bench and forge.

Mark leaned against the bolted door, his heart pounding with the strain of crisis. His mind's eye followed that black shadow as it came stealing down the dark stairs.

Fourteen steps down from the floor above. He must be at the bottom by this time, peering into the darkness of hall and shop, darkness broken only by the faint red glimmer of the forge, falling through Lee Wing's little porthole.

"Now!" the blind man murmured. "It is time to spread out the bait. The silver bait!"

He reached along a shelf until his fingers found a large blue ginger jar. It weighed heavily, for it was packed to the brim with coins; a portion of Lee Wing's savings. Mark let the round lid fall and turned the jar upside down. Coins gushed out in a ringing, rattling shower, so that some of them rolled off the table and scattered across the floor.

"*Hai!* I am plagued by devils!" Mark Wing grumbled aloud, then dropped to his hands and knees, crawling about the floor in clumsy search and exclaiming angrily as he bumped into various obstacles.

The suddenly his bent figure tensed and straightened, his whole body rigid with an intensity of listening.

His sharp ears caught the faint clicking of the doorknob as it turned, a second click as the pressure was relaxed, the intruder finding the door immovable. Mark placed his ear against the wall and waited. When his unseen enemy opened Lee's porthole window he would feel the vibration from the swivel hinges.

Mark's heart gave a wild plunge as he felt the tremor. The little window was now wide open, his foe thrusting his head inside to see the table where the money lay spread out.

With trembling fingers the blind man slid the razor-edged knife from his girdle. One swift stroke severed a taut cord which was fastened along the wall, and Mark Wing's trap was sprung.

Mark Wing stood back, his head cocked to one side a little. On his lips a smile rested.

Something descended with a sliding rush —a voice cried out in startled terror—and instantly the whole room shook with the trapped man's furious eflorts to wrench himself free; free of the cunningly shaped shutter which had dropped around his neck, pinning his throat like a wooden noose.

But the victim's frantic clawing and scratching, his wrenching and straining, were all in vain. With his head on one side of the wall, and his arms and legs on the other, no possible contortions could free his neck from the heavily weighted yoke which had turned Lee Wing's porthole into a miniature pillory.

THE blind man waited, silently clutching his knife, until the first berserk fury of his enemy had ceased.

"Speak out thy name, thief of the darkness and spiller of blood!" Mark cried out in a challenging voice, but there was no answer. The only sound in the room was the hoarse, gasping breath of his prisoner.

Mark Wing gave a grim laugh. "Hoya! I have a means at hand to loosen thy tongue!"

Turning to the forge, he plucked the heated iron from the blazing fire and crossed the room with unerring step, holding the white-hot point before him.

"Speak out—or burn!" he warned.

Stark words of terror came gasping from the lips of the helpless prisoner. "No! No! Hold thy hand, Mark Wing! I speak!"

"Hola! The voice of Yuan Shu!" Mark cried. "So it was the Honorable Captain of the Suey Sings who stole the Sacred Bowl

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he had sworn to guard with his life! And because of thy wicked thieving, Yuan Shu, my brother lies dead! Hai! The Rice-Face Law shall deal with thee, but not before I have had my turn!"

Mark Wing's voice grew cold and stern as the Ninth Law of Tao. "Was it not enough to steal my brother's life, but thou must return to the house of thy crime to take the money he had put by? It is fitting that I should take this iron and burn a devil-mark upon thy forehead, so all men will say, 'Behold, Yuan Shu the Thief, who robs the dead and the blind!"

Yuan Shu screamed as the hissing metal came closer, so that its heat scorched his cheek. "Spare me!" he shrieked, writhing and twisting in terror. "In the name of Kwan-Yin the Merciful! Spare me, Mark Wing, and I will give back the Bowl! It is buried under earth in the cellar of my lodging. Go to the *tuchun* Kim Hoy and tell him where to dig, but go at once, and take this burning iron from before my eyes!"

Then Mark Wing gave a great shout of triumph. He had won. Against all odds and the handicap of blind eyes, he had won his fight. He would return the Sacred Bowl to the Suey Sings, and the honor of the House of Wing would stand untarnished. More than this, Tai Yat his friend would be free again to lighten the dark hours.

The blind man ran to the door, tugging at the bolts until it swung wide. Raising Sergeant O'Hara's silver whistle to his lips, he sent shrill blasts whirling into the night until an answering whistle came from the distance, growing louder to the sound of footsteps, the solid footsteps of a Blue Coat man.

"Wah!" Mark Wing lifted his face toward the starlit sky he could not see. "To the Lords of Even-Handed Justice, who dwell beyond the Bowl of Night, *kan shieh* —grateful thanks!"

SOUTH of the BORDER

Doc Harker . . . stately, dignified purveyor of Chickasha Remedies—*and the world's most eccentric sleuth* . . . lands plumb in the middle of a double-cross between two merciless killers warring against each other for the profits from an infamous white-slave racket.

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Yaqui Gold

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

There in the torch's glare sat the ancient guardian of the Tiopa Mine

SOMEWHERE deep in Yaqui land lies the lost Tiopa Mine, and that is the goal of Don Wayland. A flyer, Wayland was previously hired by two smart promoters, Ledgate and Dennis, to hunt for the mine; but Wayland's plane cracked up in Yaqui land, and eventually he and his companion, Herb Keller, found refuge in the camp of Gilbert Frayne.

Also on the trail of the Tiopa Mine, Frayne convinces Wayland that Ledgate and Dennis are a couple of crooks, and so the flyer changes his allegiance. An important factor in Don Wayland's decision is the lovely redhead, Lorela Frayne, who now accompanies her father; Don had fallen in love with her back in the town of Guaymas, where she was posing as a night club singer.

Before the expedition can reach the mine, the wild Yaquis must be placated. Gilbert Frayne's loyal lieutenant is Santana Chayoga, a member of the local tribe; he wins the good will of Yacupaz, the chief. But Jalana, an ancient witch greatly feared by the Yaquis, has decreed that the white strangers must die, and certain of the young warriors blindly follow her bidding. Though Frayne and Wayland do not know it, Jalana is deliberately serving the interests of Ledgate and Dennis.

So it's a race between the Frayne expedition and Ledgate and Dennis, its outcome depending upon the unpredictable Indios. After several brushes with Jalana's warriors, Wayland and his party reach the sacred Lake of the Gods. This is supposed to mark the site of the ancient mine; and when Frayne discovers that the lake is an artificial one, damned up by human hands, he knows that the riches they seek lie be-

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near its waters. Probably the lake was contrived hundreds of years before by the Spaniards to protect their gold.

Camping there, the party finds a certain measure of safety, for the Yaquis fear the lake and will not go near it. At present, too, Yacupaz the friendly chief, is managing to control his people; but Wayland and Frayne realize that at any moment the sinister power of the witch Jalana may send the Yaquis against them.

Then a plane hired by Ledgate and Dennis circles over the camp, and a message is dropped. It is from Corey Ledgate, warning Frayne and Wayland to get out of Yaqui land. The Mexican government is moving troops into the hills, Ledgate says, and that will arouse the Yaquis to fury. So Wayland must work fast, if he is to reach the mine before that grim *barranca* becomes a battleground. . . .

CHAPTER XV

THE ANCIENT GUARDIAN

THAT night the village fires burned higher, and the Yaqui voices were louder, a sullen muttering, unintelligible except as a promise of violence. Frayne's *tamenes* were stolid enough but they could not conceal their apprehension, and Chayoga went from group to group.

Wayland could not hear what the *capataz* was saying, but his gestures were all too clear. He was warning his men against surprise attacks by the malcontents of Yacupaz' tribe.

"Tomorrow," Frayne said, pointing at the sketch map he had made of the lake and the adjoining meadow, mesa, and cliffs, "we'll start exploring."

"Why, that's pretty well downstream," Wayland objected. "The mine ought to be above the dam. Under water, we figured. Or you did."

"I noticed a quantity of tailings from a quartz vein." He fished in his pocket. "Here you are. Crushed in an old-fashioned *arrastra*."

"You mean one of those big, flat bed grinders, a mill-stone affair?" Wayland examined the granules of rock.

"That's right. Turned by burros, perhaps by Yaqui slave labor. Notice anything odd about these bits?"

Wayland examined the granules for a moment and then looked up, puzzled. "What's the catch? This stuff has spots of color like bits of pyrites. Fool's gold, I think they call it—brassy enough not to make me look more than once."

Frayne chuckled. "This Sierra Madre country has a peculiar ore that does look pretty much like fool's gold, but the odd thing is, it is nothing of the kind. Just crush it, and wash the particles of gold out. We could make expenses out of this dump."

"The devil we could! Why'd they leave it, then?"

"Because there was such a rich lode. The Mexican miner always skimmed the best, and would not bother with anything but high grade. That, and the crude methods they used, make any dump a pretty good find. Provided you can get machinery to the scene, and provided you can get labor."

"Then we've found it!"

"Yes, but what we have found is not enough to interest investors and the Mexican Government. We have to prove that this is actually the lost Tiopa, and that there is an unexhausted lode."

Wayland looked so disappointed that Frayne laughed. "Cheer up, Don! This is enough to work on. And I'm starting a routine search, tracing the general direction from which this stuff came, years ago, before the dam was built. In that way, I can make a better guess as to where to pick up the vein. The fewer prospect shafts we have to dig, the better."

Wayland cocked his head, and listened to the muttering of the Yaqui villagers. The drums had begun to pound, and by now he much preferred a rattlesnake's warning. "The way they're sounding off, I'd say we'll be lucky to get out of here, much less dig prospect holes. That plane going over here hasn't helped matters."

"We're here now," Frayne said, and went to his shelter. "Good night."

Wayland sat by the fire, watching ash film over the embers. The Yaquis were in their blankets, some stretched out in

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their brush shelters, others squatting in angles of the barricade, on guard against their wild kinsmen. Finally Wayland went over to where Chayoga had started to spread his blankets.

"How bad is it, Santana?"

"It may become worse, *señor*. That accursed *aeroplano!*"

"What's the drumming about?"

"They hold a council. That is what makes the promise of being worse. It is well to watch, though I do not think that it will happen tonight, *señor*."

Wayland let it go at that, and within half an hour, as far as he knew, he was the only person in camp who was awake. In spite of their undeniable vigilance, the sentries did seem to sleep on their posts, and relied on an animal instinct to arouse them. Undoubtedly there was some difference between the sleep of a guard, and that of a man off duty, so that while civilized men had to walk a beat, these savages could rest and at the same time perceive the approach of danger.

WAYLAND took Frayne's flashlight from its place at the entrance of the hut, and then headed for the narrow opening in the barricade. The man squatting there did not stir until Wayland was almost in the open; then he looked up, muttered, let his hand sink to his chest again. During that brief arousing, he had drawn his revolver, and now, apparently in his resumed sleep, he was holstering it.

Wayland was about to leave the enclosure when he heard a low voice behind him. He turned; it was Lorela. "Don, what's wrong? I've been awake—those drums. I saw you sitting by the fire, and then I saw you get Dad's flashlight."

"Did I look scared?"

"No. But your expression kept changing as you sat there, I could swear that you were carrying on an argument with yourself."

"Nothing's wrong, darling. Run back and try to sleep."

"Not until you tell me. Don't try to laugh it off. Something is on your mind, has been ever since Dad told you about those scraps of rock he picked up."

He gently twisted his wrists from her grasp. "I didn't tell him because he'd have thought I was trying to teach him something. I just had a hunch, and I guess it's wild, crazy, or he'd have thought of it. Lord knows, I don't know a thing about mining. So I thought I'd take a quiet look-see. I'll tell you when I get back."

"Oh, no you won't! I'm going, too."

"You would have to be a pest!"

"Please, Don, tell me anyway."

"All right, if you'll go back then. It's those tunnels in the face of the cliff nearest us. We were wondering this afternoon why the fool Yaquis hadn't squatted on that side, instead of going way up on the ledge, on the far side."

"Well, what's your answer?"

"These tunnels must be more hoodooed than the ones on the shelf. There's just as much overhang to protect them, and it's a lot closer to water and fuel."

"Please come to the point!"

"I want to see what the kink is," he evaded. "While it's dark, while everyone is busy up in the village holding a powwow."

Wayland would not turn back, and Lorela would not retreat; so they compromised by going together along the fringe of the lake. Each stirring in the *tules* startled them; the sounds of the valley became louder, more alarming as they came nearer to the towering cliff.

Finally, Wayland halted at its foot, some three or four hundred yards from camp. As far as he could judge, there was nothing behind to cut off his retreat. The drumming and the muttering had not changed in tone.

"Here's the path," he whispered. "If anyone'd been within half a mile of us, they'd have heard us cracking through the brush and stumbling over rocks."

"We're not shot down yet," she said, and clung tightly to him for a moment. "So we might as well go up."

"You're shaking as much as I am! All

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right, up you go!" Wayland commanded.

Slowly, they crept up the steep trail, and to the shelf that was some forty-odd feet above the margin of the lake. The moon had not yet risen, and the water was an unruffled blackness with a faint metallic glint. Wayland and Lorela were both panting from suppressed excitement, and he wondered how much of that came from an instinctive realization of peril, and how much from the thrill of testing a hunch.

AS WAYLAND reasoned, the hoodoo that made this side of the valley avoided could be connected with the mine. Frayne's remark about forced labor to operate the *arrastra* had started his vague chain of thought: The entire locale, in Indian eyes, would be evil on this account, and after two hundred years, the original reasonable aversion would have developed into a taboo.

He explained this to Lorela as they paused to look down and back, and across the *barranca* where lights winked and enemies thumped their drums. "These people," he said, "haven't always lived here. They once had a higher plateau, Chayoga said, a fertile *mesa* from which they were driven by bombing attacks when an old regime decided to blot them out. Old, but only yesterday compared to the age of the Tiopa.

"So Yacupaz and his people fled to this sheltered spot, forced by necessity to risk the curse on a long-abandoned region. A forbidden lake, plus cliff dwellings and caverns once occupied by the aborigines, many centuries ago."

"You idiot, why didn't you explain it to Dad?"

He shrugged. "Too fanciful. After all, I didn't explain to you until you'd made a point of it. Well, let's go!"

There was another ascent, steeper than the first. Here and there, the path had been crudely cut into steps which had weathered so that the shaping seemed almost natural. When Wayland followed Lorela to the head of that stage, they were nearly a hundred feet above the lake.

"Look!" She still whispered, as though the Yaquis across the *barranca* could hear any louder tone. "Wood—big timbers—"

He crouched beside her, and felt the beams. "Squared with an adze! This isn't Indian work. We're hot, red hot! This is something we couldn't see from the ground."

"Where's your light?"

"Oh, no! Those lads across the *barranca* might spot us."

"But we could get back to camp before they could cut us off!"

"More nerve than sense," Wayland grumbled. "Say! That's iron—a spike. Feel it! I'm going in—there is something funny about this cliff dwelling. Crawl in after me."

"Uh-uh! Dad said everything around here is full of snakes."

"Rattlers ring their bells, but Yaquis don't. This place is nice."

He crept into the blackness, feeling his way over rough floor. After a yard or so, he encountered another squared timber. He rose, and the tunnel ceiling crushed his hat.

Lorela said, "Oh, snap on your light. They wouldn't see it all that distance; it's a mile."

"Mmmm . . . This isn't anywhere near in a direct line, so no one in the village could see, now that we're inside."

"More than that," Lorela said, laughing tremulously, "they'd think it was ghosts and would that scare them."

But she had edged to the shelter of his arm before he snapped on the flashlight. An internal flaw in the great mass of the cliff had let some of the roof cave in; or so Wayland guessed.

"Look! Tool marks—drill marks—on the wall! No 'Ancient One' ever cut this, honey. And the floor—rutted from wheels. Ore carts."

"Where to, and where from? A hundred feet—"

"Those big beams on the ledge. Part of a wooden tower or trestle, or elevator, something for letting the ore down to the

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ground level—to the lake floor, to the floor that used to be dry. The smelter, the big grinding mill, all that must be under the Lake of the Gods."

"Then this never was a cliff dwelling, was it?"

"Maybe. Well, it really must have been to start, but some Spaniard found an outcropping in this hideout the aborigines had abandoned for centuries. Found an outcropping, after picking up some chunks of 'float' down at the foot of the cliff. Followed the vein."

They stumbled over the debris. Lorela fell, cutting her hands and knees, but she laughed, and was on her feet before Wayland could help her. They lurched over the obstacle, and then, once more on level floor, they paused to look about. At any point the tunnel could dip swiftly, or there might be a steep descent, a vertical shaft to pick up the vein as it twisted down into the heart of the rock.

Then they saw the last occupant of the Tiopa Mine. There was still a guardian, and he had been on duty for two hundred years. Lorela cried out, and Wayland gasped. A skeleton, half-buried by debris, was huddled against the wall.

Lorela's laugh was hysterical. "In armor, too! Isn't it awful!"

"Poor devil." Wayland knelt with his light. "Crushed when the ceiling crumbled. His helmet isn't badly dented, and neither his cuirass, but a ton of rock on his legs."

"He starved—he must have been alone here. Maybe that rock fall put him out of his misery."

Wayland had removed his hat. After a moment, he shook his head. "No, he wasn't that lucky." He picked up a rusted dagger, whose iron grip and guard made a perfect cross if held by the blade. "Lying by his hand, his improvised crucifix."

He rose, played his flashlight down the tunnel, and saw that there was a curve, and a gradual downward dip. "Let's go back. Somehow I'd like to have this poor chap buried before we do any prospecting."

And all the way back to camp, Wayland was wondering at the fate of that man in early eighteenth century armor; whether he was one of a detachment posted to guard the abandoned Tiopa, or whether, a member of some long-forgotten punitive expedition, he had stumbled across the lost mine and had been trapped.

CHAPTER XVI

GIFT FROM THE LONG DEAD

THE following day no food was brought to camp, although Yaqui hunters were taking game to the village. Frayne kept the ledge under observation through his glasses, and each time he answered Wayland's anxious question, "No, I can't see Yacupaz."

There were plenty of reasonable explanations for the chief's not showing himself, but Wayland feared that Yacupaz kept out of sight because he had to. Chayoga finally said, "*Amo,* I do not think they have killed him, not even with that airplane passing over so soon after you arrive. We seldom if ever kill a chief, except perhaps for losing too many battles."

Frayne spent some moments loading his straight-grain pipe. He was equally deliberate in getting it evenly lighted. "Oh, one thing more, Chayoga: Do they ever kill a medicine man or a witch?"

His eyes had not a trace of the twinkle that often belied the complete seriousness of his voice and features. Wayland said, "I think you've got something there!"

Chayoga eyed both men, nodded as if checking off ancient cases that marched through his memory of tradition. Then he began, "*Amo,* during the Villa revolt my father served with a *Belikani* captain of very much the stature and appearance of Señor Wayland. Now this captain marched his men across the desert. Across the Bolson de Mapimi. There is no place in the world where there is more heat, and less water.

"We marched, we marched, we marched, by all the saints, how we marched. There was no water and the heat burst the drum heads, and there was nothing to drink but a gourd of *tequila,* and we could not drink that because my grandfather's head was

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pickled in it. He had fallen in battle only a week before, and he would have been angry if his head had been thrown away instead of being taken to our home in the Tepe Suene."

Chayoga was droning now as he squatted on the ground. His eyes were half-closed, and he swayed like a snake fascinated by a soft fluting. Wayland could see the vultures following, the horses failing, the men clawing the mud in one water hole after another; the dry camp that night, with whispering sands, and men muttering with black lips.

"Now this captain was a great magician, though they did not yet know it, and he had his back to his men, sitting there without fear, looking into the darkness much further and much deeper than other men, though by day, my father, who was twice the captain's age, could see much further.

"Now this captain thought we slept, and he got up very softly, and he started marching. We saw him. We saw him, but we did not move, for we knew he was going out for some purpose of his own. And when he came back, hours later, there was an Arab trader with him, and a burro loaded with *pulque,* and we all drank, and the Arab led us to a village, and there was water and food."

The point of this was not entirely clear to Wayland. He eyed Frayne, and obeyed the answering glance that warned him to silence.

CHAYOGA went on; he told of the goats they killed in the village, and the women they chased, and the *tequila* they drank, and the stores they looted. And of course, they shot the *alcalde,* and rang the church bell until the bell fell from its support and killed one man, and what fun it was, bathing in the hot springs outside the village.

"So we were dead tired, dog tired, drunken sleepy and lying all around in the sand," Chayoga went on. "So my father told it, *amo,* and he rarely told lies except to Mexicans. Then this captain began to kick us, saying, up, wake up, we march, now, *pronto,* quickly! Not a sound, no noise, do not beat drums, do not whisper, do not saddle up a horse, there is much danger and little time.

"Figure it out for yourselves, gentlemen. Marching in darkness is bad, and without drums makes it worse, and on foot—*chinga'o,* what a captain! My father had his machete ready, and my other uncle was ready. They were not sure whether to kill the captain at once, or to wait a little while.

"One said, killing a magician is risky.

"The other said, it is riskier not to kill a magician who doesn't know his business."

"But I like this fellow. For a *Belikani,* he is very good to us."

"I also like him, but I think we'll have to kill him anyway."

"This was true, *señores.* My father and my uncle and all the men liked this captain who had saved us from thirst, but it seemed now that he made bad magic, marching by night and in silence, so it was best to kill him. And he knew, of course, that we were planning, but he was too brave to run or look over his shoulder.

"He walked straight, *clump-clump-clump,* awkwardly like all white men, saving your honor's presence. Steadily, and unafraid. And later my father said, killing such a brave man is sad work, but the skin of a magician would make a splendid drum, and the spirits would be glad, and we would all reach the Tepe Suene alive, and grandfather would be pleased that his head got home.

"No, *señores,* we did not kill the captain. My father was about to strike, when there was a big shooting and a riding and a shouting, and many *Federalistas* closed in on the camp we had just abandoned. Then we turned and while they were looking for sleeping men to kill, we shot them down.

"And from then on, we knew that our captain was a great magician and we followed him everywhere without any doubts. But you see, we did nearly kill him, and this is done with a witch who gives bad counsel.

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"And this," he added after a somber moment, "is done to a chief for like reasons, and figure it for yourselves, *señores,* why my uncle Yacupaz does not show himself."

The *capataz* rose. Wayland said to him, "Figure something else, Chayoga. Figure a way to make people think that Jalana is a very stupid witch."

"*Aywah, señor,*" Chayoga answered, and his eyes and bleak smile promised that he would do his best.

Toward sunset, the *capataz* went up the steep trail to the village, and Wayland, watching him, said to Frayne, "I'm afraid he's taking too much risk, going up there. You noticed he had a burn on his face, didn't you?"

"I noticed, and I noticed also that he put particular emphasis on the cuts he'd gotten, while scrambling after Yacupaz, that early morning when we were wondering if our bombs would work. I'd not be surprised but what he faced some ordeal or test, so I didn't ask him for details."

WHEN darkness fell, Frayne and Wayland retraced the latter's path along the lake and up the face of the cliff. With increasing hostility, and the apparent eclipse of Yacupaz, a retreat down the Bavispe and back to the coast seemed to be in order, but before leaving, Frayne wanted to establish the status of the Tiopa Mine. He had candles in addition to his flashlight, a geologist's hammer, and a knapsack.

"No wonder," he said, as he clambered up the path, "we didn't get a fair idea of the opening!"

Once inside, and past the fall of rock, he paused to examine the skeleton, the high steel casque with the upturned edges, and the cuirass. "Eighteenth century, all right," he decided. "I mean, made in the early part of that century, though the Spanish *hacendados* in California wore helmets and used lances right up to the gold rush days."

Wayland and Frayne took turns about using the short-handled shovel they had brought. After an hour, they had moved, by shovel and by hand, most of the debris, and the Spanish soldier was freed. The fact that no comrade had released him indicated peculiar circumstances: and these, Frayne reasoned, could well have a bearing on the exploration of the mine.

"A cross passage," Wayland said, as the ceiling-high debris heap leveled off. "And look at the drill and hammer. This poor devil was at work when the roof let go."

A pocket of stale air slowly thinned. Far beyond the reach of the flashlight, water trickled. The passage was full of rubbish, broken ore carts, old harness; at one time, it had been used to stable the burros who drew the carts. Apparently this was a branch in the vein, the portion first worked, first exhausted.

Frayne spent some moments near the entrance, and his scrutiny centered on the drill holes in the ceiling. "See that? Blasting, with black powder, of course. Got a fall of rock, but not enough to block the tunnel. Did you notice rock, a lot of it, under our soldier as well as over him?

"So he started drilling more holes. For more pockets of powder. Only, he'd done a better job than he realized, and down she came, just from his hammering."

"But why? Why, one man alone, doing all this work?"

"I've been thinking of that ever since you told me. Here's a guess. The mine was abandoned because the Jesuits were ordered out of Mexico, and not because the lode was exhausted. That's proved by the damming up of the river, and so on. You don't hide things that are worthless. It was not Indian raids that forced the abandonment of this place, though of course there must have been trouble, almost routine trouble, you might say."

"You don't hide worthless things," Wayland echoed. "Then why try to hide the mouth of this tunnel—an exhausted vein, according to your reasoning?"

"That is the very point. So let's look, let's poke around in this rubbish."

They began raking heaps of rotting tarpaulin, and rusty tools. As they did so,

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Frayne went on: "A cave-in would keep this place from being used as a stable, but it would not keep anyone away from a valuable ore vein.

"So, I'd say this fellow had something hidden here, something that was out of the ordinary, not to be expected in an exhausted vein."

HALF an hour later, they found a small chest in a space hollowed out of the floor and covered with dirt. It contained half a dozen hefty ingots, very heavy, and of a dirty wheat color.

"It's gold!" Wayland exclaimed.

Frayne's hand trembled as he played the flashlight on the ingot.

"Look at the stamp. The coat of arms of Leon and Castille, and there's the double-barred cross symbol of the Jesuits. A thief, sneaking back to the abandoned mine, cached this loot, because he was on duty and could not carry heavy plunder without being conspicuous. His company, guarding the Jesuits and civilians, was camped only a few miles away, on the first day's inevitably slow march.

"Later, he was going to return and get his booty. Just as the Jesuits hoped to return, and resume charge of the mine. You've been very patient, Don, listening to all this. Maybe you understand—"

"I think so. All this proves that the Tiopa was worth returning to, that the legend is right about its richness, that it wasn't abandoned because it had been played out. That Mexican politics, kicking out one religious order after another, ended by hiding this fabulous place."

"But for all that, we want some samples."

So they went back into the main passage, and this time, they followed it far into the heart of the mountain. Time had rotted the hoist ropes, but the ancient ladders, lashed together with rawhide, still held. Downward and south, always down and back toward camp; until Wayland said, "If there isn't a lower outlet, it's damn funny. Look how they had to haul the ore. Why didn't they run another drift?"

On the next level, Wayland found his answer. The tunnel was ankle deep in water, and the fall of the floor was so steep that before long the water approached the ceiling.

"We are now at the level of the lake," Frayne said. "We must be, for I'm sure my counting ladder rungs and otherwise estimating the net drop couldn't be terribly out. The Tiopa workings, the active workings the Jesuits abandoned, are under water."

Wayland sighed, and all at once he became aware of his weariness; he felt the smarting of the blisters he had raised in clearing the debris from the soldier's skeleton, and every muscle twitched from reaction to the discovery of those ingots. But the big prize, the thing that would vindicate Frayne's judgment, was deep under sacred waters that would not be drained without making matters worse in the Yaqui village.

Slowly, they climbed up, and each ladder seemed twice as long as it had been. At the recently cleared tunnel they picked up their ingots and the pieces of Spanish silver coin in the little chest.

"I don't know," Frayne said, "how we can bury this poor chap. I'd rather like to, for after a couple centuries, you can't condemn a man for a bit of pilfering. If we get out of here alive, his plunder will pay my expenses half a dozen times over, and leave some to divide among us. Nobody rich, but a nest egg all around."

"It's a cinch we can't take him down by daylight. Might wrap him in a blanket and let him down with ropes. I bet he's what put a super-hoodoo on this side of the *barranca*."

"I'd be down to my last penny," Frayne said, "if it weren't for this gold an unknown soldier stole from the Jesuits."

CHAPTER XVII

DYNAMITE BY NIGHT

WAYLAND'S plans for the nameless man at arms whose theft from the priests had, two centuries later, saved Gil-

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bert Frayne from the prospect of leaving Yaqui land penniless, were interrupted. The two prospectors had scarcely reached the foot of the cliff when there were yells in the village. In spite of the distance, the voices carried clearly.

"Chayoga!" Wayland gasped, dismayed at the thought that the *capataz* might have been cornered by the hotheads of Jalana's faction. "What'll we do?"

A shot smacked into the rumble of voices. Dogs yapped, and women and children screeched. Wayland drew his pistol, and without thought turned to run upstream to try to dash through the Bavispe, for there was no time to loop around by the camp. Frayne caught his arm, and spun him about with a grip that was surprisingly firm.

"Don't, Don! You can't bluff a village that's revolted against its chief! If he hasn't escaped, he'll be dead before you could get halfway up that steep path."

"We need Chayoga!" Wayland pulled away. "Fine fellow—"

"We need you," Frayne said, his voice cold and clear. "If you could save him, if we all could, I'd be with you. But we can't. Now hurry—back to camp! Before there's a panic."

The noise welled up. Another shot, and a third. Torches danced on the high shelf.

Wayland stumbled after Frayne, for there was no room to pass him, except by ploughing through *tules* and dense brush. By the time they reached camp, the *tamenes* were on their feet.

Wayland shouted, "Grab your guns and run along the dam; we'll cover his escape. There's still noise, so he can't be down!"

Frayne followed, for the rush had crowded him into a corner. Wayland had the powerful flashlight. The long curve of the dam ate precious seconds. Men stumbled and fell in the dark, and a few rolled down the steep embankment; two were splashing in the *tules*. The leaders began blazing away at the shelf, until Wayland yelled, "Cut it out! *Cuida'o!* If he's coming down, you'll hit him."

He stopped at the spillway and trained the flashlight beam against the path that wormed up the cliff to the ledge. The spread of the rays made the blob of light dim, but he was certain that something was moving, bounding from one terraced wide spot to the next.

Frayne said, "We don't know who is who. Don't fire yet, listen a second more!"

"Only one man. The others are up there, afraid of the light."

Arrows whizzed toward the spillway, but Wayland kept the light trained on the edge of the shelf. A dark mass milled and surged about, for those who caught the distance-dimmed glare full in the eye, found it confusing, something new and hence terrifying enough to make them hesitate.

Nearby, a man yelled. Wayland lowered the light below the shelf, and Keller, who had joined the rush, leveled his rifle and pumped several slugs at the rocky path. Bullets whistled as they glanced upward, and it was certain that whoever had rushed to the edge of the shelf had been peppered with fragments of rock and shattered bullet jackets.

Chayoga's voice was now plain. Instead of trying the tricky crossing of the spillway, whose current even with low water could easily sweep him down into the deep pool at the foot, he ran downstream to a shallow, broad place he could readily ford.

The *tamenes* doubled back across the dam. Keller tagged along with Wayland on the heels of the pack, and gasped, "The answer is no, as far as getting this Jalana behind the eight ball. Don, we're out on a limb. Looks like another cross-country jaunt and it's asking too much, figuring you and me win a second hurdle race through the hills, huh?"

THEY reached the river as Chayoga was climbing out of the water. He slipped and splashed back. Keller and Wayland plunged in to catch him before an eddy swept him back toward the swifter center. He was out of breath, cut and slashed; when he reached the bank, he fell face forward and lay there.

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Frayne knelt beside him and asked, "Hurt bad, Santana? Where'd they get you?"

"I can walk, *amo,*" he panted, and struggled to his knees. "It is nothing; they only tried to keep me from getting away. But we are dead men—if we do not leave. Yacupaz is outlawed, he has a day's start to reach safety. Then he is hunted down, or he can hide. He will starve, for no man can live alone in this country."

Loyalty to tribe or clan was not sentiment, but necessity; and similarly, the group needed each man, so they had tried to spare Chayoga, until his wrath had forced a fight. Only this hesitancy to cut him down had given him the slender chance he had taken.

Yacupaz, a chief who had been discredited, was too dangerous to tolerate, so they had banished him. Actually, banishment was a death sentence, unless he got as far as Tonichi and settled down to become a tame Yaqui. And this, without any doubt, was something the old man could not endure. The wounds to his spirit would finish him where hardship would have no effect.

"Make rafts, *amo,*" Chayoga said, when he entered the enclosure of the camp. "We can stand only a short siege here. They will starve us out. Now that Yacupaz is gone, the older men and the honorable young ones cannot for long hold the hotheads back."

The *tamenes* had made torches of wood and resin, and by the light of smoky flames they set to work making up bales. But this hurry was wasted. From the other side of the Bavispe, rifles flashed, and bullets and arrows thudded into the barricades and zipped overhead. The porters dropped flat with their revealing torches.

Plunder hungry, the rebels did not propose to let Frayne get out of the country with his blankets and cartridges, his coffee and tobacco and sugar, his knives and tools, and burros; but they would take their time about assaulting the camp, for they knew well how deadly it would be to try rushing modern revolvers and rifles.

The handful of drunken bucks who had made such an attempt had been sobered by Wayland's bombs, and the Yaquis had all the time they needed. If not tomorrow, then on the day after they would win.

Perhaps they would not rush the forbidden lake, but once hunger and arrows had conquered the desperate defenders, greed would end by tempting the tribesmen to risk taboos for the short time needed for a thorough looting. Jalana, beyond any doubt, would devise a loophole in the law of tradition, or she herself, an intimate friend of gods and demons, could haul the stuff to a safe distance from the dam.

"Now's our chance," Wayland said. "Chayoga says they won't try rushing us, particularly not at night."

"Chance?" Keller snorted. "Ten times what we got ain't half a chance. Chance for what?"

"To slip out of this camp and into the mine tunnel, up on the cliff. We won't starve any faster there, and I think we could hang on longer, being free from sniping."

"Darling, as I told you in Guaymas, we still have to eat," said Lorela. She was on Wayland's left, where she sat with her hands clasped about her knees. "I don't mind a skeleton for company, though that tunnel has an unhappy precedent for people starving."

"Yeah, we got to eat," Keller seconded.

"Fishing by night, on the most hoodooed side of the hoodooed lake," Wayland explained, "would be easier and safer than trying to fish from the dam, day or night. If we can't net them, we can dynamite a few each day."

"But we'll finally run out of nets, and dynamite, long before Jalana runs out of patience and loot-hungry. Yaquis," Frayne insisted.

"Folks—" Wayland addressed them all, including poker-faced Tula, who had seen worse situations during the Villa revolt, and so considered this something to take in one's stride. "That blue plane was just

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the first caller. There'll be more of them."

"That is right, *señor!* Before I escape, I become too certain that Jalana is almost every day in touch with your enemies, those flying men. But that will make it worse, no?"

"Far from it. We'll hide out, they'll come in. They'll start wrangling with the natives quickly enough. Dennis and Ledgate will be overbearing, and that'll be our chance."

"Say, you got something!" Keller leaped to his feet. "Gimme something to haul, if it ain't too heavy."

A FEW *tamenes* fed the fires. Others, under Wayland's direction, fired an occasional shot at the place from which the flight of arrows had come, and varied this by dropping bullets into the path leading down from the village.

Wayland was building up an illusion: jittery sentries, firing at every crackling twig, easy game when they finally ran out of ammunition. Thinking this, the Yaquis would not only take their time about rushing, but would have their attention drawn away from the silent procession that filed toward the cliff.

Bundle after bundle was carried through the darkness. The burros would have to be abandoned, or else kept close to the space between cliff and lake, where they could eat *tules* and brush until the Yaquis would seize them.

Keller made two trips, then stayed to help Wayland keep up the demonstration. He was worried about being bottled up in the tunnel, and was all in favor of a surprise attack and a dash downstream before pursuit could be organized.

"Don, you and me out-run 'em, didn't we, and you were packing me in a dugout after we got dumped off that log we started on. Why can't we—"

"Cut it, Herb! First, there's too many of us, and second, I don't think you and I would have done it if we'd known from the start what we were facing. I'd've been too scared to act. Another thing, those heels in Guaymas are too anxious to sink us. We've found the mine now; we can't leave it to them."

"I still don't like being bottled up," Keller grumbled.

"Oh, all right. I've been thinking, too. Grab that shovel, and give me a lift." He hailed Chayoga, and said to the *capataz,* "Cover us, just in case some one of your peevish relatives finds out what I'm up to and takes a shot."

Chayoga sniffed the air, and then answered, "Very good, *señor.* It is still a few hours until dawn." He looked at the watch Wayland had given him and grinned with pleasure. "The little clock on my wrist is very nice, but I am not used to it yet. It also says, not long until daylight."

Wayland crept out of the enclosure. The moon had risen, but the cliffs cast their shadows all the way across the *barranca,* and darkness blotted out every detail along the dam except the glint of the water and the foaming where it splashed into the pool. There was no danger of being outlined against the sky, for he and Keller set to work somewhat below the crest of the dam.

They took turns, for both could not dig together; the hole was to sink straight into the dam, and as far down as they could dig in the time they had. Wayland's back was aching, and his hands had new blisters, while Keller, for all his beef, could not long at a time endure the cramped digging. His peeled back was still tender. "This oughta be through to water by now," he muttered, and gave his pick to Wayland. "With two cases of dynamite, what's the use of digging all the way through?"

"It's a long way, Herb, we're not in deep enough to count. If I'd thought of this sooner, if we'd—gangway, so I can swing it!"

But he had not made half the progress he had hoped to make before Chayoga crept nearer. *"Cuida'o señor.* You must leave now. They have heard, yes, but they think you throw up earthworks. They must not know what you really do, or they will shoot at you when you go to work again tomorrow night."

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"Are we fully moved into the tunnel?"

"Totally, *señor;* except the dynamite. There is nothing left for those kinsmen of mine to steal. Hurry, there is not too much time; there may be an attack just at dawn."

They picked up the tools and crept along the dam. A dog howled up on the ledge, and a water fowl splashed at the fringe of the *tules.* At the camp the *tamenes* who had been watching, shouldered the cases of explosive which Wayland had hoped to plant so as to blow a hole in the embankment. This was to drain the lower tunnel, and provide an exit in the last emergency; a surprise to catch the Yaqui besiegers off-guard.

"No hope for Yacupaz?" Wayland asked as they began the ascent of the narrow path.

"*Quien sabe, señor?* When a chief is deposed, he goes out to die, for it is not fit for men to mock him, or to be sorry for him. This is part of a chief's duty, and he knows this before he becomes a chief."

There was already a grayness that drove night out of the *barranca,* and a glow on the highest snowcap, when Wayland followed Keller and the Yaquis into the tunnel.

"We made it," he said to Frayne, "but we didn't get the job done."

Below, the hobbled burros were stirring. There were sounds in the village across the *barranca.* And then, well below the dam, rifles blazed, and men yelled. The attack was closing in. Flaming arrows lanced the air. Brush shelters blazed up. And then a long drawn howl drowned all other sounds. The raiders had learned why there was no answering fire.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOST LEADER

WHEN the Yaquis learned from the trampled brush and the stirring of the burros along the narrow strip between lake and cliff that Frayne's party had moved upstream, they ceased yelling. They did not make any attempt to slip up and capture the pack animals, nor did they bother to take cover as the sun rose.

They were plainly puzzled and incredulous. Every sign pointed toward flight to the tunnel, nearly a hundred feet up on the face of the cliff; indeed, they could without doubt see the glint of rifle barrels in the dark mouth of the refuge. But still they could not believe it.

Chayoga explained, "I think, *amo,* that they believe that spirits have snatched us away. Maybe because we camped by the Lake of the Gods we were seized for our trespass, you understand? They do not believe anyone is crazy enough to go up here because he wishes to."

"I hope it works out that way," Wayland said.

"You comprehend, *señor,* I am guessing. I can easily be wrong. Still, they are my own people, even if they have become totally faithless and worthless!"

Keller's eyes widened as he heard Chayoga's low-voiced denunciations. "Either I ain't understanding him right, or else he does not care for his relatives."

Lorela came from the cross passage and into the main tunnel. "You folks might as well tighten up your belts," she said. "I think that is what one does when there is a prolonged grocery shortage, and from all Tula and I can find, we have just that situation. Few groceries, and"—she gestured to the outside— "prolonged."

"*Amo,* ask Doña Lorela to keep as many of the tin-box foods as possible until last. They will be best for our sudden departure. If they fall into the water, they do not spoil."

Keller, crouching near the tunnel mouth, yelled and drew back. Chips of rock showered into the tunnel, a ricochet bullet whined, and a rifle cracked. A Yaqui sniper was on the job; apparently their awe of the accursed cavern would not prevent them from taking pot-shots. Keller was mopping his eyes with a handkerchief and muttering luridly.

"Slug came from upstream," Wayland decided, "judging from how it hit and

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how the pieces flew. Not from directly in front, but we better watch it. Build up a wall across the mouth, so we can see and not be picked off too easily."

Tula ground corn meal and baked *tortillas*. The old ore carts furnished fuel, though that would not last any too long. Frayne said to the *tamenes*, "You have been honest and faithful. If you wish to leave, you may do so, with a day's food and with enough guns and cartridges and burros. Maybe if you leave us, your wild kinsmen will spare you."

Baycurí, who had returned now that he no longer had to carry the guilt for Chayoga's attempt to knife Wayland, stepped up and said: "*Amo*, there is danger enough to make us leave you, and your offer is generous. But it is more dangerous for us to try to leave."

Airan, the cook, spoke up: "Do not worry, *amo*, we will not eat too much; we will slip out by night and steal food or snare game. And when your enemies come in an *aeroplano*, you will steal it and we all fly away."

Frayne edged Wayland to one side and said, "You have it all sized up, as I have. Share and share alike, but damn short rations. These Yaquis can live on less than a white man, I know, but ration it out closely. So we'll have some left when they're gone. They'll be leaving us when they get used to the situation. When they figure out some way of slipping through the cordon without being bushwhacked by their wild relatives."

"They're good boys, and honest."

"We're not taking an unfair advantage. We eat what they eat. They'll get tired of that long before they or we are starving."

"Or, they may sneak out and fish, or snare quail."

DURING the entire day bullets smacked against the barricade that blocked the mouth of the tunnel, although in the afternoon these shots were many minutes apart. Wayland rigged up a dummy stuffed with ancient straw and corn husks from the cross-passage stables, and kept a man tempting the snipers to waste ammunition. But cartridges were valuable, and the Yaquis became cagey.

Keller, still scowling because his face had been cut by flying bullet-jacket fragments, kept the *barranca* under close observation with Frayne's glasses. After an hour or two, he said, "Don, I got that guy spotted. Upstream. The one that's popped slugs at us all day. Gimme your hat."

A scarf plus a hat made the old dummy look different. Wayland now had the glasses trained on the quarter Keller had pointed out. "Tough shot, but I might try it without a 'scope."

He could barely pick out the lurking Yaqui. The fellow could be seen only when he moved a little. Wayland knew that looking over the sights of a rifle, he could not possibly find his target. It would be lost when he laid down the glasses.

At last he figured it out. "Watch, Herb, you take the glasses. Watch that hunk of reddish granite."

"He ain't behind that!"

"Watch it anyway. When your man moves and is exactly two gauge marks away from the center of your lens, holler and I'll shoot."

"I get it. Indirect fire, artillery gag. You set your sights off center and aim at the red rock, only you hit alongside it and get the sniper."

"Wait till we try it."

The sun was dipping, and long purple shadows marched across the *barranca*. Keller struck a match for the dummy's imaginary cigarette. A second later, he said, "Watch it, he's getting ready. Hold it—something funny. He ain't finished raising his gun—what the hell!"

"What's wrong?" Wayland was startled by the change of tone.

"Another Yaqui sneaked up and knifed the guy, so clean there ain't a thing moving now. I can't find either of them!"

That night, Wayland got the answer. A voice called from below, "Do not shoot, I am a friend. Let me come up."

Baycurí brought the news to Wayland,

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who was busy with a *tortilla* and coffee. "Tell him he can come up alone. If there are two, we'll shoot both." Then he went after Baycurí to be sure it worked out to the letter.

A wild Yaqui was coming up; the odor of bear grease and smoke and buckskin, the bouquet of the village, all came with this man. He carried a bundle, and he wore a knife. When he was half way between the first landing and the tunnel mouth, he said, "I am Yacupaz. I must see my nephew Chayoga."

Wayland's exclamation touched off a muttering that reached all through the occupied part of the tunnel. Chayoga, however, came very deliberately to the tunnel mouth. "Welcome, Uncle. We are glad to see you."

Yacupaz handed him the bag he had brought up. "Here are some quail I snared, and a few trout." He smiled, and then his eyes became dangerous for a moment. "There was other game, too, but I do not think it fit to eat."

Wayland said, "You stabbed that sniper?"

"*Aywah!* He was one of those who ran me out of my own village! Whoever disobeys me and shoots at people under my protection—that one at least is dead. They thought I would run far into the hills and die, a man without a tribe."

He expanded his chest, raised his chin even higher; and he gestured toward Frayne and Wayland and the others. "But they are crazy. I join this tribe, your chief is my chief. If you do not fear the dead, and the curse of the man in iron, I do not fear."

Later, Wayland said to Lorela, "Honey, now that we have that dead soldier put away in another tunnel, it's cozy enough here. And I feel a lot better. Yacupaz, somehow, bucked up my morale. We're fighting this thing out.

"We'll wait for our chance, sneak the dynamite back to the dam, blast her open, and stake our claim. Stake it, and get back to Guaymas to file it. I'll poke Dennis' pie face until he looks like he's been run back and forth through a rock crusher—"

"Darling, you mustn't be so bloodthirsty," Lorela said, and laughed. But there was a catch in her voice when she continued, "Yacupaz is a grand old man. And do you know who his new chief is?"

"He didn't mention names."

"He meant you. I'm proud of you."

Wayland grinned; then he was serious. "Do you know what it means? A Yaqui chief got kicked out and didn't go out into the woods to die as tradition says he should. Old hardshell Yacupaz is getting in step with the times. He'll save what's left of his people."

"You like these Yaquis, don't you?"

"Lousy devils, they'll skin a man alive, burn him alive, but how would we act if we'd spent four centuries under Spanish *conquistadores?* Your dad says they weren't such cussed people until civilization tried to grind them out with gunpowder and with slavery in Yucatan."

WELL after dark Chayoga and Yacupaz followed Wayland down the path. They checked up on the hobbled burros, then went on with the short-handled shovels, to resume the mining of the dam.

The three took turns at the cramped work. They had to pry and wrestle with each rock that was embedded in the thick dam, and these boulders had to be piled on the slope, so that they would not roll and betray the furtive work by dropping into the pool. The flow of water over the spillway masked the shoveling, but for all that, it was unnerving labor.

The very skill with which Yacupaz had outwitted his rebel tribesmen told Wayland what cunning woodsmen surrounded the Lake of the Gods. He was trembling and his legs were wobbly when, finally, all but a few sticks of dynamite were tamped into place. The few retained were for emergencies, in case the draining of the submerged tunnels revealed cave-ins which blocked the route of escape.

The fuse was waterproof, and Wayland sealed its end against moisture and the impending rains.

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"It is done, *señor,*" Chayoga said. "If they know, they will hardly understand. Even if they understood, they would not dare come to the dam and take the dynamite by night. And by day we could drive them off with rifle fire."

"Why do we not blow it up tonight?" Yacupaz asked.

"Because we do not know whether there is a low tunnel that opens to the lake bottom. So before we blow up the dam, we have to find another way. A way by the east, maybe up the face of this cliff, and instead of going to the sea, we go toward Chihuahua. What do you say?"

"Let me think," Yacupaz answered, "while we go to the tunnel."

During the return, Wayland considered the chances of winning a start by dashing upstream, along the cliff whose face was a mile from the opposite one, on the shelf of which Yacupaz' village was perched. If there were any feasible path, the fugitives could get well up toward the lip of the great ravine while the Yaquis organized for the dash down from their shelf and across the *barranca.*

When the three were back in the tunnel, Yacupaz said, "*Señor,* there is no path for many miles. Before we got to one, we would be killed. But there is a place where perhaps I could make a way that your people could follow. If I crept out by night, and cut foot holds, and tested the strength of bushes rooted in cracks."

On the following day, though Jalana's fanatic followers did not come close to the Lake of the Gods, they kept a tight cordon. Drums rolled day and night; there was chanting in the village on the shelf; and down in the *barranca* they were beating the brush, frightening the small game that could have been snared. Too far away for sniping, they could hurl rocks with slings, driving away quail and rabbits and water fowl.

Yacupaz said, "I do not know how I can bring you more food. Jalana is wise, she is full of hatred, and I know by now that your enemies have paid her well. Unless we find a path, there is no help for us. Who of us could go into the village to kill her?"

Chayoga answered, "Uncle, it is not impossible."

Wayland cut in, "Do not try it. You could do it, maybe, but you would not come back. We need you for the return trip."

That night Yacupaz crept down the path, when the moon cast just the right shadows. In spite of all argument, he insisted that he could, alone, sneak through the cordon, and try out the hazardous path up the face of the cliff.

"I am already a dead man. I live only because you have let me into your tribe."

That settled it, and he went.

Wayland sat up all night, listening. Lorela sat with him in the darkness. They were waiting for a yell or a shot, hoping that it would not come. The gloom of the *barranca* was alive with hatred and death, and Yacupaz had gone single-handed to meet it.

At last Wayland heard a stirring below. A burro was moving a little faster than for plain browsing. From hours of listening, Wayland had become accustomed to the sounds of the sturdy little beasts. Most of them were dirty brown, or mouse-colored; one or two were a light cream. These he could just perceive in the darkness.

Lorela caught his arm when she heard his involuntary intake of breath. "What's the matter?"

"Shhh—" He listened a full minute. Then, "That white burro—something dark against him blotted him for a second. Flashlight, quick!"

In a moment she was huddled close to him, the flashlight ready to snap on. The white burro was not moving. But something was. He slowly got his rifle into line. "Now!" And Lorela snapped the light, throwing a white blaze just beyond the conspicuous burro.

Two black-haired Yaquis were visible. Before they could take cover, Wayland fired. "Got him!" he yelled. "Shift the light!"

But one man was a bag limit.

Lorela spotted the beam around for a moment, and then snapped it off.

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CHAPTER XIX

BESIEGED CLIFFS

FRAYNE and Chayoga came running before Wayland could lever in a second cartridge, and the *tamenes* turned out. Keller, still half asleep, said to Wayland: "Don't go down to check up. Those lugs are waiting for you to get careless."

"Somebody," Wayland said, "isn't so scared of the Lake of the Gods."

"Jalana must have led them," was Chayoga's guess. "Only a bold few, but each day they draw in closer. It takes time for people to get used to being near an accursed place."

Wayland soaked a bundle of half disintegrated fodder with gasoline and touched a match to it just as he let it drop over the edge. Blazing, it landed at the foot of the cliff, and for a while the burros were visible, placidly browsing. The fallen Yaqui's spilled blood worried them no more than rifle fire.

Keller said, "That guy down there learned it's hoodoo to fool around by the lake. Maybe it's a lesson to the rest of 'em."

With that, he decided to sleep on the situation, and left Lorela with her father and Wayland. Silently, the trio waited for dawn, and wondered what had happened to Yacupaz.

An hour later, a sudden sound just below the ledge made Wayland reach swiftly for his pistol. Then he relaxed when a guttural voice said, "I am back, *señor*."

Yacupaz crept through the narrow gap left in the barricade at the tunnel mouth. Wayland caught his hand. "Sit down, tell me what you know. I was afraid—"

"I also was afraid when I heard the shots. Now, what I know: Five of your burros are gone, I counted them."

"What?"

"Yes. When I came back, I had to find each burro, for there might be a man hidden behind one. I looked, there was only a dead man."

"We can't spare the animals!" Frayne said. "If we post a watch down there, we'll lose men. If we don't post a guard, we'll lose a few more burros each night. I think we'd better blow the dam while we can, and before the cordon comes too close."

"Is there a path?" Wayland asked Yacupaz.

"I could climb it, with great danger. I must work some nights yet. We must use pack ropes in spots. If we can use that trail, we need no burros; none could follow it. And not many of us will get to Chihuahua. Downstream, with burros or rafts, yes. But do not eat too much while you wait for me; it is better to be hungry now and have food when we run."

Around noon, Chayoga said to Lorela, "*Señorita*, you must bleach your dyed hair. There is no more risk from its natural color, for there is already every danger that can be."

"But it might drive them completely crazy," she protested. "That witch might get a glimpse of me."

"You do not understand," Chayoga explained. " I want them to see you, because our danger cannot be greater. But your changed color may save your life, and not all of us can be sure of getting to Chihuahua or the sea."

"Do as he says," Wayland counseled. "If we are captured, Jalana will have to protect you to protect her own homemade legend."

Lorela shook her head. "I can't, Don. I don't know why, but I can't take an escape of that kind, one that none of you can share. Suppose I did live through it, a prisoner in a cave? No, I'll take my chances."

There was no arguing with her. Wayland finally said, "All right, stubborn, maybe I'll have to tie you and give you a beauty treatment!"

FRAYNE hoarded the remaining canned goods and rationed out the game Yacupaz had brought. There were no more quail to be snared in the *barranca*, for the Yaquis systematicaly beat the brush. Each night, Yacupaz slipped out with a heavy knife, a short pinch bar, and a sack into

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which he could put the fragments he loosened in making hand and foot holds. Once, perhaps centuries ago, the trail had been passable, but an earthquake had wrenched a thousand-ton chunk out of the cliff, and this gap was too much for anyone but a mountain Yaqui.

Each night, there were attempts to steal burros. Sometimes there was no alarm, and it was only on the return of Yacupaz that Wayland learned of the disappearance of another animal. And his luck was bad, for out of several attempts at sniping by the beam of his flashlight, he succeeded in wounding only one raider; and that one escaped.

"We better eat them jackasses ourselves," Keller grumbled. "That's what the Yaquis are doing; I can see quarters of fresh meat. Take these glasses and look into the village if you don't believe it."

Yacupaz, weary and with bleeding hands, came back from a task that would have driven a white man mad. In the dark, guarding every move, levering and cutting so that there would be no betraying sound, he worked his way up the cliff; and each loosened fragment had to be carried down, or thrust into some crevice at the side, where it could not fall. But for all his dangerous work, and the scarcity of small game, he did once bring back some food: wild honey—only a little, but he grinned as he gave Wayland proof of having in a small way outwitted the cordon.

"They'll catch you yet, Yacupaz. Let's touch off the blast while we can," Wayland urged.

"No, *jefe.* They won't catch me. And now I fear that you can't get at the fuse. I think the witch has found signs of digging. Maybe she does not understand, but she is suspicious. By night I could hear signs of men lurking by the lake. The fear is fading."

Wayland divided the comb of wild honey.

He was not sure how much longer the *tamenes* would put up with short rations; they were looking peaked, and they began eyeing the canned goods Frayne saved for the march. The armored Spaniard who had starved in this tunnel began to worry them, and they muttered about hearing him stirring at night, looking for food.

Yacupaz said, "Tonight I'll finish the steps, and soon the moon will be right. Shadow on our side at the rising, a full bright moon."

The hungry cave dwellers watched the sun all day slowly creeping across the stark blue sky. Across the *barranca,* there was more noise than ever. There were more fires, and *zopilotes* settled about heaps of carrion. The enemy were banqueting on stolen burro. The voices were exultant now, rather than wrathful. There was a fiesta, Wayland suspected, and Chayoga confirmed the guess.

"Celebration, *si.* The drum notes, the song. No, I do not get the words, but the tune, you comprehend. Triumph, victory. We have blocked them, they were angry, but now they are glad. Something has promised them we die soon."

"Jalana?"

"Jalana always gives some-day promises," the *capataz* gravely answered, "but now she must have reason for promising surely and soon to kill us."

"The Golden Goddess?" Frayne looked up from loading his pipe. "That's been her keynote."

"Yes, *amo.* The Joy-of-Deliverance-from-Bondage Song."

Lorela shook her head. "But my hair isn't golden! I'll fool her!"

Chayoga sighed. "*señorita,* I am afraid. If she seized you and bleached your hair, she would fulfill her promise. Why would she not guess the trick of dyeing? That just blocked her, it did not fool her. Her spies told her of you. Would she not think of a way?"

Wayland rose, fists clenched. "You mean she's so certain she can capture us that she's celebrating?"

Chayoga made a gesture, palms outspread and turned up. "Only the event can prove it, but so I feel, inside of me."

"They'll play hell taking us by main force, rushing that hundred foot path."

"I do not say how, *señor.*"

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And Chayoga went to sit against the rock wall. When it happened, he would do what was to be done. When Yacupaz was awakened to eat, he listened and confirmed Chayoga's somber opinion.

Stolidly, he said, "Maybe the old stories are right, *jefe*. We have done well, we are about to escape, but hear that singing. Maybe there is a curse, for in no other way can she beat us as she promises."

He also sat down. Since he was no longer a chief, he did not have to worry; that was Wayland's duty.

YACUPAZ was finishing his corn-husk cigarette when Wayland heard the same sound that had precipitated hostilties some days previous. A motor was droning, far up in the thin, cold air.

"Damnation!" He jumped to the barricade. "Back again!" He cocked his head. "No, not the same plane. Two engines."

They watched her wheeling in great circles, slowly becoming larger and larger than the *zopilotes* who soared and patiently waited for more men to die. They had picked the Yaqui burro chief clean.

"This is what Jalana promised them," Wayland said to the group that crowded close to the barricade. "This proves it, proves she's hand in hand with Ledgate and Dennis. She expected a plane."

The aluminum fuselage gleamed, and her engines and the vibration of her propellers made the *barranca* roll with thunder. This was a hydroplane; and the *tamenes* marveled at the great splashing, at the graceful arc as she swooped down to the lake and lost way, skillfully handled to avoid fouling with the *tules*.

Wayland had his rifle ready, but the spray and the speed and the range combined to trick him. He hoped he had drilled her fuselage, but there was no sudden racing of the engine to hearten him; her props were undamaged, and now she was headed for the furthest branch of the crescent.

He took two careful shots at her fuselage, and heard the whistle of one ricochet. The other bullet impact was followed by a metallic smack as of a shot landing squarely on a tank.

"Armored!"

"That ain't the half of it, pal," Keller said. "Look! Door opening."

With the glasses, Wayland got the details. It was a hatchway, and the black nose and cooling jacket of a machine gun was thrust out. Before he could yell, a burst spattered against the barricade. Flying fragments cut hands and faces. Wrathful, Keller wormed along the floor and thrust a rifle through a crevice.

The shot made the hydroplane shell ring, but the answering burst drove him back, face bleeding from chipped rock.

When darkness came, a spotlight focused on the tunnel mouth. There were no more shots, but none were needed. Yacupaz would not be able to go to his work on the face of the cliff, nor could anyone get near the mouth of the tunnel. Not trusting their own allies, the newcomers, as far as Wayland could observe, had kept to the hydroplane, guarded by sacred water.

Slanted Yaqui eyes were continually on Wayland, and he began to feel the aloneness that is part of a chief's life. No one asked him what he was going to do, or said that there was anything he should do. The men were not chattering, for this was beyond their imagination, and all they could do was look and wait.

Fear came into the tunnel and silenced the white prisoners. At last Wayland said, "They're going to ask us to surrender."

"Psychic, huh?" But Keller had no grin this time.

"It's in the cards. They know we can't rush them out there in that lake. They don't know about the trail Yacupaz was working on, and they figure we've not a chance to run out on the downstream side. They're not using their spotlight, eating up a battery for nothing. It's to soften us, get it? Jalana's been keeping them posted, telling them we've got tough."

"Say! You got something. But what? Why bluff?"

Frayne knocked the ashes out of his pipe and said, "For Yaquis to murder us is

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one thing. These crooks, a little less honest than a decent savage, want to pretend to themselves that they're giving us a chance to get out, yield the mine. And then be murdered by the Yaquis as we leave."

This being in English, Yacupaz did not understand until Chayoga translated. Then the old man brightened. "That is right, *señor*. If they do parley, that is our one thin chance."

Wayland rose. "Break out grub, feed these boys!" He turned to Frayne. "Sorry, but I want to do that. They need morale and there's nothing like a well stuffed stomach. If we starve later, okay, but now we've got to bluff a little."

Lorela whispered, "Now I see why Yacupaz calls you *jefe!*"

"Don't be too sure until you see how this turns out!"

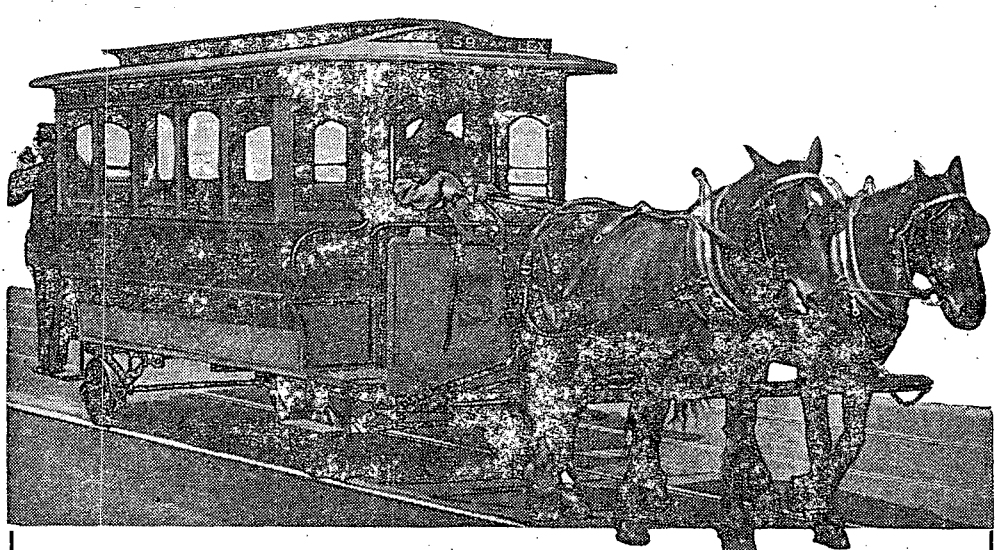
TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Goodbye, Gentlemen

THE Nazis have now abolished gentlemen. Dr. Alfred Rosenberg announced not long ago that "the gentleman has become a British type of the capitalist age" and will therefore be eliminated by the present war. There's no place for him any more.

But the abolition may not be an easy task. The Nazis will have to investigate every corner of their new world, to ferret out the men who cling doggedly to an outlawed code of courtesy and self-respect.

—Eric Sharpe



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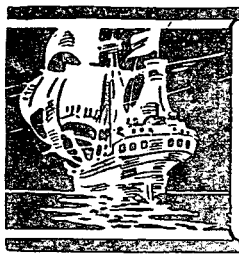

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

IN A job like ours, it is absolutely necessary to know everything, only we don't. We cheerfully publish a story about the pigmies of Central Africa, and then the pigmy chief, who has been a constant reader of ARGOSY for twelve years, writes in to complain about inaccuracies. That's overstating the case, of course; but the fact remains that among ARGOSY readers there are an astonishing number of experts on obscure subjects.

Here's an example. A while ago Stookie Allen got up a Men of Daring on the Orchid Hunters, and now we have a letter from a gentleman who is one. A loyal reader for nearly thirty years, he is

HENRY P. BUTCHER

I wish to take some exceptions to your "Men of Daring" in ARGOSY for the week of April 27th, 1940, about orchids and orchid hunters. First of all orchids are not parasites as you have made reference to them. Also the names "Christmas" and "Easter" are very vague. As you no doubt know, all known orchids have a family name as well as a descriptive one.

I happen to be a hunter and collector of orchids and anything about them interests me. I have covered quite a lot of country here in Central America and I have yet to get a guide. I think I know the bush just about as well or better than any of the natives here.

I have been a reader of ARGOSY since 1912 and this is my first squawk. I believe the first story I read was "The Monkey Man." It sure gave me the shivers as I was twelve years old at the time.

Tell Mr. Allen if he wants correct dope on his orchids to drop me a line. I would gladly help him out. I have no comment to make about ARGOSY except this—if it wasn't good I wouldn't have bought it this long.

GATUN, CANAL ZONE

MR. BUTCHER puts his plaint very mildly, you see. He is flattering but inaccurate when he prefaces one remark with "As you no doubt know." We don't know. So we turn the whole matter over to that well-known expert,

STOOKIE ALLEN

Far be it from me to start a quibble with Mr. Henry P. Butcher, an old orchid hunter himself. All I know about *parasitos* is what I see in the papers or in Mr. Norman MacDonald's excellent book *The Orchid Hunters* published by Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., of New York City.

Orchids of course are not (anyway I hope they're not) parasites. But *parasitos* is apparently the Spanish word for them in common usage in the South American orchid country. Don't ask me why. Christmas orchid, according to Mr. MacDonald's book, is the name generally employed by florists and collectors for *Cattleya Trianae;* as is Easter orchid for *Cattleya Mossiae.*

If Mr. Butcher is implying that Messrs. MacDonald and MacKay were tenderfeet because they availed themselves of the services of old timers who knew more about finding and collecting *parasitos* than they did—well, they were. But according to the book they certainly won their spurs as successful hunters. If you want to know anything further about *parasitos,* please don't ask this old tenderfoot.

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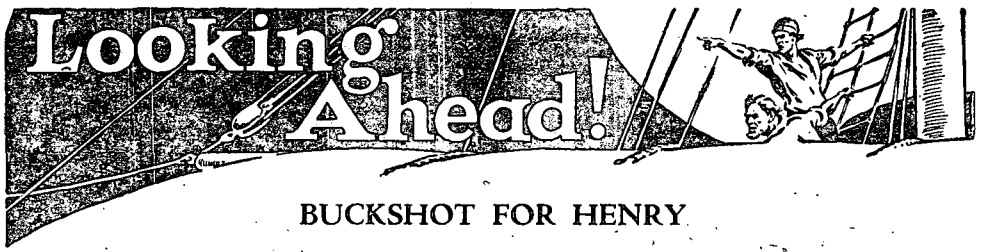

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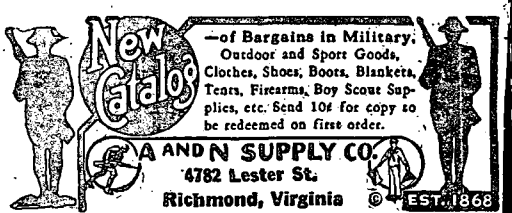
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Attained Age at Death	Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death Amount	Auto Accidental Death Amount	Travel Accidental Death Amount
1-40	$1000.00	$2000.00	$3000.00
41-50	750.00	1500.00	2250.00
51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
57-62	300.00	600.00	900.00
63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
69-75	100.00	200.00	300.00

ACT NOW—AND RETURN COUPON AT ONCE

BANKERS LIFE AND CASUALTY CO.
Bankers Insurance Bldg., Jefferson Sta., Desk 132, Chicago, Ill.

Please send details and tell me how to get the Family Group Policy for free inspection.

Name ----------

Street or R. F. D. ----------

City ---------- *State* ----------

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